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A COMEDY OF CIRCUMSTANCE

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"She's a nectarine peach—a Burbank improvement on the regular variety."

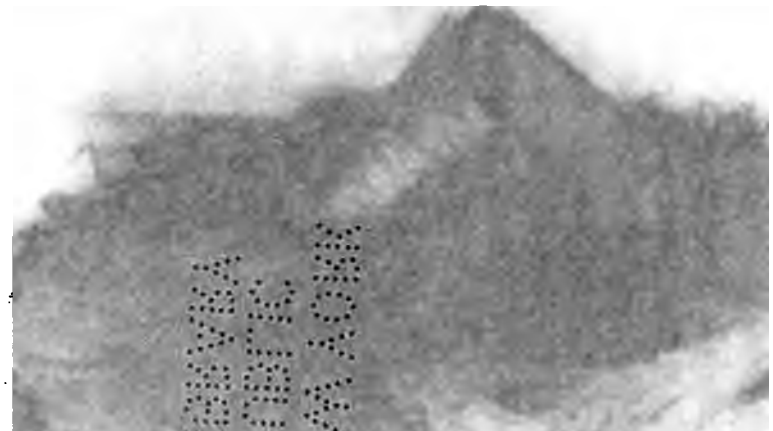
A COMEDY OF CIRCUMSTANCE

BY

EMMA CAVE

ILLUSTRATED BY WALLACE MORGAN

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1911



A COMEDY OF CIRCUMSTANCE

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EMMA GAVF

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. Tells how Mr. Carmichael pursues his destiny, of an adventure with a suit case, and a journey all too brief 3

II. Shows how Mr. Carmichael enlists his friend Mr. West in the scheme for obtaining an invitation to spend the Christmas holidays in Kentucky 21

III. Introduces Mr. Luke Strange, a post-graduate and a Theologue and the only Louisville man available; and relates how Mr. Carmichael and Mr. West warmed to him with results satisfactory to all parties . . 28

IV. In which three men and a maid travel to Kentucky, the minister in the lead, until an unfortunate accident restores the hero to his proper place before the footlights . 43

V. At the Kent home in Louisville. Preparations for a Christmas ball. Mr. William West makes the most of his opportunities while his friend is confined to his room. Christmas shopping and a singular conversation overheard by Jane. Mrs. Kent and Miss Donovan discuss Mr. Strange in a frivolous manner after dinner 59

VI. Shows how the wounded hero, chafing at his confinement, makes friends with Mrs. Binkins who acts as Loves' Messenger, convey-

CONTENTS—*Continued*

CHAPTER		PAGE
	ing flowers and unsigned notes from next door; how this lady, assisted by Mike Fahey, the policeman, connives at an act of insubordination; and how as the climax is reached, the lights go out . . .	75
VII.	The Christmas Ball—showing the Rev. Mr. Strange in a new light, and discovering to Jane in an unexpected manner her knight of the suit case	99
VIII.	The Christmas Ball continued. Mr. Carmichael finds himself at a disadvantage, and seeks an opportunity to explain . .	108
IX.	Relates a conversation betweeen Nixie and Jane, in the course of which they agree to unite forces, and afford Mr. Carmichael the opportunity he desires	122
X.	In which the entanglement of Mr. Carmichael and Miss Donovan scores a point . .	128
XI.	In which the truth of the situation begins to dawn on Mr. Carmichael, in consequence of which he asserts himself, and wins one blissful afternoon	138
XII.	Shows how too many opportunities came knocking at the door, impelling Mr. Carmichael to flight	151
XIII.	Tells of the last evening at the Kents', relates three important conversations, and ends merrily with a midnight supper . .	168
XIV.	Tells of Mrs. Binkins's efforts to speed the parting guests, and of the cloud no larger than a girl's hand that rises upon our hero's horizon	185

CONTENTS—*Continued*

CHAPTER		PAGE
XV.	Showing how Angus Carmichael languished through the spring term, and how Billy West resorted to stratagem in the hope of arousing his dormant ambition . .	196
XVI.	Tells how three young ladies, products of culture, education and the higher life, bring Mr. Carmichael to a realization of his awful deficiencies in these branches and send him back aroused to the nearness of exams.	206
XVII.	Which coming a bit too soon to be an epilogue, shall be the posy of a ring . .	214
XVIII.	In which Mr. Carmichael is discovered on his way to Kentucky; and Mrs. Binkins's calendar plays her false	222
XIX.	Which is all owing to that deceitful calendar, but is not so sad as it might be . .	232
XX.	In which the curtain falls upon our All Star Cast.	248

ILLUSTRATIONS

"She's a nectarine peach — a Burbank improvement on the regular variety" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Behind him came the slender young woman whom Angus had twice seen 44

"Your tears, or hers?" inquired Jane after a glance at the card 116

"I've got to go back to college day after to-morrow. This may be the last minute we'll have alone together" 148

"By the way, Janey, what has become of our two Yale friends?" 236

A COMEDY OF CIRCUMSTANCE

A Comedy of Circumstance

CHAPTER I

Tells how Mr. Carmichael pursues his destiny; of an adventure with a suit case, and a journey all too brief

THE matinees were just over, and Broadway breathed that vibrant, tingling electric atmosphere which is created when thousands of people fill the streets all more or less swayed by the influence of a dramatic mood.

White lights were dancing into view along the great thoroughfare, masses of crimson flowers and California violets glowed softly through the frosty panes of florists' shops. People laughed and jostled each other on the crowded pavements. Girls bundled in furs and with cheeks glowing, daintily picked

their way with conscious grace over the snowy streets; men straightened their shoulders and assumed a smarter air. Broadway was exacting her homage.

In the crowd at Thirty-second Street, swinging shoulder to shoulder with long, easy strides, two Yale men beat up against the tide, making their way to the Forty-second Street Station.

The shorter of the two was Billy West, a clean-limbed athlete who had borne off more than one cup as the champion runner in mighty contests, thereby winning the universal nickname of "Heels."

The other, Angus Carmichael, half a head taller, with the absurdly proportioned shoulders produced when generous nature is assisted by an over-zealous tailor, stemmed the current like a human propeller. His big body fairly breathed vitality, and his bright enthusiastic eyes, searching the shadows of every plumed hat, were young; gloriously, irresponsibly young.

"And that gypsy in the last act!" he was

saying rapturously, "Oh, Heels, talk about your *candy*! Well, she can pour my coffee any time she likes. And the girl that did the skirt dance, Clare *Something* — well, tell *me!*"

Words were evidently inadequate and as he paused for breath his companion smiled tolerantly.

"Gus, you are the limit. The light that lies in woman's eyes! Why that girl that you are talking about —— "

"You didn't see *her* eyes," hotly contended Angus, "big as a dollar and black as night."

"Buck eyes," said Heels contemptuously. "Say, have you got any change? I want to stop in here at the Martinique a second to get some cigars."

Carmichael extended a broad palm on which lay a half dollar and several smaller pieces. "That's the extent of my pile," he said ruefully.

Heels, without apology, appropriated the larger coin. "Be back in a minute," he said.

As Carmichael stood on the corner swinging his cane, and whistling the alluring strains that had wandered through the three acts of "Jingoland," a south-bound car stopped, and he saw a dainty young person dressed in brown with grace and charm in every note of girlish millinery, struggling to lift a large suit case to the platform. At the same moment another girl dashed past him — a slender, vivid figure — waving her scarf and calling frantically,

"Jane! Jane! Get off! Here I am! — *Jane!!*"

But it was all of no avail; the suit case and its owner disappeared within the crowded car. As it pulled off, Carmichael, thoroughly imbued with the urgency of the affair, started in pursuit.

It was a hot chase and it was not until the car slowed up at Thirty-second Street that he caught it. It was Thirty-first before he succeeded in pushing his way through the crowded aisle and presenting himself before the unconscious Atalanta of his chase.

"Pardon me — but — " he began breathlessly.

A pair of startled eyes were lifted to him.

"Somebody wants you to get off, you know — your friend up at Thirty-third Street."

A momentary quiver of her lip, a flash of her eyes as her lids veiled them, and she gazed straight through him at the fat woman on the seat opposite.

Now Mr. Carmichael was not given to the disconcerting habit of blushing, but at this rebuff, the hot blood showed even beneath his tan. He was not the kind, however, to be vanquished.

"She — she wanted you awfully," he went on addressing the top of her hat. "She was tall, with a gray dress, and — and, she called you Jane."

"Oh, really?" The hat brim tilted suddenly up again. "Where did you say she was?" The voice had soft Southern intonations, and was anxious.

"Up at Thirty-third Street," repeated

Carmichael. "She's waiting there now. Shall I help you off?"

"Oh, yes, please, if you will, that is — I —— " She was struggling with her suit case; but before she could lift it he had caught it up and was piloting her to the platform.

As they dodged the motors and cars and made for the sidewalk a boy on a wheel spun perilously close, and, to protect his companion, Angus thrust forward the suit case.

The total depravity of inanimate things was never more fully demonstrated. Two clasps sprang open at the concussion, and a wild array of dainty feminine belongings bestrewed Broadway! A smile rippled up and down the block, as two well-dressed young people dashed here and there frantically gathering the scattered belongings and cramming them pell mell into that faithless piece of baggage.

"I can't get the rest in," she said breathlessly, with a pink silk dressing sack under one arm and a slipper in each hand.

"Here," cried Angus, with a man's horror

of being laughed at; "put them in my pockets until we get out of this. There's our car, Come ahead!"

Angus encircled the suit case with one arm, and she tried to conceal a hair brush in her muff, as they pushed through the laughing crowd, and sought the seclusion of the north-bound car.

As they dropped into the rear seat they broke into unrestrained merriment. Up to that moment Angus had not really seen her, except as smooth and brown and well-groomed and so obviously good to look at that anyone would take her prettiness for granted. Now he realized that under the plumy brown hat her brown hair had threads of gold in it, her eyes were dappled like gold-stones, there were tones of gold in the clear shadows of her skin. In fact, the glint seemed to go all through, as she laughed in frank enjoyment of the spectacle they had presented.

"Perhaps we'd better try to get the rest of the things in now," she said when she could speak once more; but when he produced

the two slippers, and gingerly handed out the pink dressing sack with its tangle of lace and ribbons, she had a relapse.

"I am so sorry," she gasped, "but I can't help it. You — you don't know how funny you looked."

"So did you," he insisted, "only you would have run away and left all your things there on the pavement. Honestly I thought you were going to."

"If I had only known where to run!" she agreed. "Isn't this Thirty-third Street?"

Angus started guiltily. "By George! it's Thirty-fourth. I am awfully sorry; we'll have to walk a block back."

When they got there the young lady in gray was nowhere to be seen!

Angus's companion gave him one quick look of suspicion, and her eyes began to kindle ominously.

"Just wait now," said Carmichael reassuringly. "She's around here some place, she must be! She — why I am sure she knew I was going after you!"

"But didn't you *tell* her? How do you even know it was Nixie Donovan?"

"She had on a gray dress, hadn't she? With a sort of fur fixing on her hat, and red hair."

"It's not red at all, it's auburn."

"Well auburn then, and — and she called you Jane."

"Of course it was Nixie, but where is she?" The girl looked worried. "You see I was to go out home with her, to Summit, and she was going to meet me at the Twenty-third Street Ferry."

"So that if I hadn't butted in ——" began Angus remorsefully, but she interrupted.

"It was very kind of you, I'm sure — only I don't quite know what to do."

"Go right on down to the ferry, and I'll bet she will be there by the time you are."

"Then I'd better hurry," said Jane. "Is that my car? I don't even know which way to go. I've been visiting up on the Hudson, you know, and this is my first time in New York alone. I've been pinning my faith to policemen about transfers and things."

"Well I haven't my badge on me," said Angus, taking a fresh hold on the obstreperous suit case, "but I'm going down that way, and if you don't mind my going down on the same car, I can show you the way."

"We — ll," Jane agreed with a little note of hesitation and withdrawal, looking at him dubiously. There was, however, no mistaking his frank ingenuousness.

"You — you are sure you wouldn't mind?" She looked up gratefully, and Angus felt a little quiver run down his spine. He shot a furtive glance toward the lobby of the Martinique in sudden fear that Heels was still lingering about searching for a lost comrade. But that philosopher had evidently gone serenely on to catch his train, declining to assume any responsibility in behalf of his erratic chum.

By the time they reached the ferry it was dusk, and the usual going-home crowd thronged the cars, the station, and the ferries. Angus and Jane made a round of the waiting rooms, but no Miss Donovan was to be found.

"It's getting so dark," the girl said at last, and once more anxiously, "that I think perhaps if you will put me on the right boat I'd better go on out to Summit without her. It's simple enough after you get across the river, I suppose."

Angus shook his head positively: "Not for a stranger. There are lots of ways of making a mistake. I think if you don't mind, I will go along. In fact," — he was suddenly cautioned by her manner to be inspired — "I am going over to Jersey myself to — to Montclair."

"Oh! Do you live in Montclair?"

"Well — er — yes. That is, my people live in St. Louis. I am at New Haven in college. Just going out to Montclair for the night, a sort of smoker, you know."

It was vague and rather badly done, but the little lady was too perturbed to be critical.

"It's awfully good of you," she said absently, still watching the doorways. "I hate to bother you with that crazy old suit case."

"We will take the next boat," began Angus,

then paused abruptly. The left hand deep in his pocket had closed upon his last quarter! He stood there gnawing his lip in chagrin.

"What is it?" asked Jane.

"Nothing at all — only ——" He grew confidential. "You know, I forgot something I ought to have attended to. Would you mind very much waiting fifteen or twenty minutes for me?"

"Oh, I think I ought to go on, it's so late. If you'll start me right ——"

"I — I wouldn't think of letting you go alone. The boats go every few minutes — besides Miss Donovan may come yet. You'll wait for me, won't you?"

Jane looked at the dense crowd surging toward the gates; then she glanced helplessly at her insecure suit case over which her big companion was standing guard.

"It will explode again if you try to lift it," he threatened. "Promise you will wait?"

She laughed in spite of herself and nodded, and he dashed away through the crowd.

Fifteen minutes later he returned breath-

less, with a useless watchfob crammed into his vest pocket, along with several crisp bills.

"There's a boat just starting," he gasped. "Do you mind a bit of a sprint?"

Once on the boat with the cold bracing air blowing in from the sea, their spirits went up by leaps.

"Isn't it jolly!" she cried, as enthusiastic as a child. "Look at the lights — the way they dance from one tall building to another!"

They were standing in the bow, their coat collars turned up, laughing into the face of the cold wind, while the rest of the passengers crowded in a dense mass within.

"Too much for you?" asked Angus.

"Not a bit of it," she declared, shaking a stray lock out of her eyes. "I'm crazy about the wind. Down home, in Kentucky, I always ride horseback when it's blowing a gale."

"Lexington, Kentucky?"

"No, Louisville," she said and lapsed into silence.

At Jersey City there was the usual Satur-

day evening scramble for the trains. The first car they entered was almost filled, but Jane found a place beside a small boy and retaining it, beckoned to Angus.

"Here's a seat for me, thank you, and there's one for you over by the door."

"I don't think this is the right car," said Angus with conviction. "Let's try the next one."

There they were more fortunate, and once more comfortably established, side by side, their acquaintance took on the aspect of old friendship.

"I'm just here for a few days more," she said, "but Miss Donovan is coming down on the twentieth to spend the Christmas Holidays with me in Kentucky. We are planning all sorts of good times."

"Oh, I say, it must be great in Kentucky," said Angus with kindling enthusiasm. "Everything you hear and read about it is so — well, so romantic; night riders, and feuds and pretty girls."

"Oh, do you think so? Why New York's

the romantic place to me," she said; then blushed furiously, and changed the subject. "Where do you suppose Miss Donovan can be?"

"Probably on another coach of this same train," said Angus. "You aren't sorry you missed her, are you Miss — Jane?"

Jane tried to look severe, but he was not the kind of person to invite dignity.

"Kent," she said. "Miss Kent's my name."

"Any relation of Bob Kent of Yale?"

"No." Then she relented. "The only relative of mine that you probably ever heard of was old Admiral Mansfield Kent. He was my uncle."

"You don't mean it! Great old chap. I read his autobiography in the magazine. Say he went everywhere, didn't he?"

"Except Heaven," said Jane demurely, "He's dead, you know."

He looked at her in surprise, then laughed.

"It's never safe to know celebrities behind the scenes," she explained. "You see I

lived with Uncle Mansfield, that is, I lived with Aunt Marcia and he used to visit us occasionally."

"What's Aunt Marcia like?" asked Angus.

Jane laughed and shook her head. "She isn't like anybody. That's her long suit; she's different."

"How?"

"Oh, every way. Aunt Marcia was years and years younger than Uncle Mansfield." She was silent a moment gazing out of the window, then she continued contritely: "It was horrid of me to say what I did about Uncle. He was good to us, in a way, but awfully cross, a sort of bountiful ogre, you know. He brought me this ring once from the island of Ceylon."

She slipped off the glove and handed him the ring.

"By Jove! that's a beauty! What is the stone, cat's eye?"

"The jewellers can't agree, some say cat's eye, and some star sapphire. Funny colour, isn't it?"

"Dandy!" said Angus, examining it minutely.

"It's supposed to be a luck stone," went on Jane. "Uncle said he bought it from an old Buddhist priest who performed miracles with it before his very eyes. But then," she added, "Uncle was an awful fibber."

"Has it brought you luck?" asked Angus.

She smiled as she slipped it back on her finger. "What do *you* think?" she asked.

The man in the next seat stopped the conductor who was passing. "What was that last station?" he asked.

"Montclair," the conductor answered wearily.

A pair of guilty eyes confronted a pair of accusing ones.

At Summit, Carmichael deposited the suit case on the platform and turned to say goodbye. As he did so, Jane gave a little shriek and rushed into the arms of the girl in gray who was descending from the next coach.

"Well Jane Kent! Where on earth have you been?"

"Oh! Nixie! Nixie! I thought I'd never find you!"

And between the two torrents of explanation Angus found himself lost in a vortex of feminine volubility.

Not so lost, however, as to be unable to make observations. Already he had discovered that the newcomer had fire not only in her hair, but little dancing flames of laughter in her eyes.

At this moment another train passed the station. In a flash Carmichael realized that in it lay his last chance of getting back to New Haven that night.

Dashing around the rear end of the car he had been on, he made a flying leap and landed on the steps of the smoker. Then as he clutched at the railing to steady himself, he gave a despairing glance backward. An engine, four passenger coaches, and a string of box cars were between him and his destiny.

CHAPTER II

Shows how Mr. Carmichael enlists his friend Mr. West in the scheme for obtaining an invitation to spend the Christmas Holidays in Kentucky

BILLY WEST threw an arm clad in a pink pajama sleeve across the Yale blue of his eiderdown coverlet.

With a doting mama, two enthusiastic sisters and a score of rapturous young women friends to supply him with sofa pillows, pennants, and photographs, not to mention the Yale blue coverlet, the bedroom of Mr. West rivalled even the bedroom of his friend Mr. Carmichael, which opened from the other side upon their common sitting room.

Mr. William West, clean-featured young sleeping-beauty that he was, was dreaming. The array of cups and trophies in the adjoining sitting room, inscribed with his name,

bore testimony to the appropriateness of his class name. Billy West was the track-team prodigy of his class.

He was running, now, or trying to, in his sleep. It might have been Marathon itself, so awful was the sense of need upon him. Yet every time he lunged forward, finger tips raised from the earth as he would have sped, the heel which this impetus threw backward, seemed caught and held by an unseen force.

With the sweat upon his brow from the superhuman effort to free himself, he groaned, threw an arm across the coverlet and opened his eyes upon his room mate, Carmichael, sitting upon the Yale blue quilt and Mr. West's foot, and talking passionately:

' The sun through the window, making a crimson patch on the papering of the western wall, proclaimed it morning, and the unwonted calm of the outside world added that it was Sunday.

Yet Mr. Carmichael wore the silk hat, the skirted overcoat, and the bedraggled orchid of yesterday. He was talking of yesterday,

too. Of trains and trolleys, of girls and suit cases, of Summits and mounts, of Clares and also of Jane. Especially of Jane.

At which point, his audience, with an upheaval of his person, intelligently directed now that he was entirely awake, caused Mr. Carmichael to lurch so precipitately as to all but deposit him on the floor.

But this young gentleman was uplifted past resentment, past appreciation of any need for resentment, and, gathering himself up and returning to a place near the footboard, he went right on.

"A caboose at midnight got me partly here, and the milk train into New Haven did the rest. But I tell you, Heels, old man, she was worth it. It's a case of lips that might have launched a thousand ships of Ilium; easy! Reserved, high-browed, standoffish? Well, rather! Just the freeze-out manner a man would like his best girl to give the other fellow. And when the chill of this thaws a bit, after she begins to know you, good Lord, man, you don't know whether

you are coming or going! And her friend, Miss Nixie Donovan, she's a nectarine peach herself; a Burbank improvement on the regular variety. You can trust me this time, old man. We have got to follow the opening up, you hear me?"

Heels gazed at him. Then he seized the pillow he had tucked under his head to bring his gaze on a level with that of the fluent Mr. Carmichael, and chucked it at him. The action bespoke outrage, and disgust.

"See here, Gus, is it your gray matter that is getting gauzy in spots, or is it mine? I leave you in all good faith for a brief minute on a congested corner on Broadway, and fourteen hours later I wake up to find you sitting on my feet and talking about Nixies and Janes. What in the deuce are you driving at?"

In ardent and glowing language Mr. Carmichael told it again. The charm of this young gentleman lay in his simple faith in his listener, as well as in his enthusiasm. But he did not fail to present his points.

Two girls; two pretty, tip-top girls, one adventure as a starter, and the future in the hands of Mr. West and himself to see that there were others.

"And, Billy," ended Angus, firmly and inexorably, "we have got just two weeks to find a man here who hails from Louisville, Kentucky; warm to him; make ourselves indispensable to his happiness, and accept his urgent invitation to go to Kentucky and spend the Christmas Holidays. We can't go down there without some sort of credentials, can we?"

"But you don't know a blooming thing about her, or rather them," demurred Billy.

"I tell you I *do*," said Angus, hotly. "Her name is Miss Jane Kent; she's a niece of that old fish Admiral Mansfield Kent, Kentucky blue-bloods. She's keen on horses and all that sort of thing. Miss Nixie Donovan, of Summit, the peach nectarine, is going down to Kentucky on the twentieth, to visit her. She is a daughter of Donovan of the Pennsylvania Railroad. I even know the train

she's going on. It's my intention, and yours, too, unless you are not as game as I have always thought you, that this date shall see you and me going to visit in that city, too. Do you see?"

Mr. West, swinging his pink-clad person out of bed as Carmichael arose, felt that he was beginning to see. Indeed, either of this precious pair, urged on by the other — for it worked either way — was apt to see. And in the case of Billy, to see was to kindle promptly to all there was in an adventure.

Still there were points to be covered before he committed himself. He considerately waited until the splashing, across in Mr. Carmichael's quarters, had subsided, and then presented himself, lather on chin and blade in hand, so pressing was the condition to be settled between them.

"If I do go," demanded Billy, " — and I'd just as lief as not — how do I know whether it will be Miss Jane Kent and her star sapphire, or the peach nectarine who will be my finish? It's got to be clearly

understood that it's a clear field and no favours."

"Sure," agreed Angus, "but I know you'll lose your head over Miss Donovan, she's just your style."

"I see," said Heels tentatively, "each fellow for himself, and all tactics go."

"Do you know any fellows here from Kentucky?" asked Angus. "What about Carter?"

"Lexington," said Heels.

"Well, you look up a man from Louisville, right away. We've got to warm to him, whoever he is. Now I've got to hustle like the dickens!"

It was noon of that day when Heels, having cut chapel to consult a list of students, held up Carmichael in the act of transit from one building to another.

"There's only one Louisville man in college this year," he said crossly, "and he's an old Post Grad and a theologue."

Whereupon the irreverent Mr. Carmichael fervently ejaculated, "Good Lord!"

CHAPTER III

Introduces Mr. Luke Strange, a Post-Graduate and a Theologue and the only Louisville man available; and relates how Mr. Carmichael and Mr. West warmed to him with results satisfactory to all parties

PRECISELY at the same hour every day, a sturdy and square-set little man in a shovel hat and clerical clothes emerged from West Divinity and took his steady, plodding way beneath the bare branched elms, across the campus, and past the fence.

As he was a bit short in the legs to his squareness of body, his clerical coat-skirts had the air of being quaintly overlong; and while his lower jaw had that out-thrust which denotes tenacity, the rest of his countenance was earnest and rosy.

Ordinarily his routine was monotonously regular, but to-day it was destined to be different.

Swinging along toward him across the campus, shoulder to shoulder, with long easy strides, came two of those younger men of the academic stamp, whose world, revolving side by side with his own, hitherto had never touched it.

Yet the faces of this pair were lit up with positive radiance as they approached; and reaching him, they stopped. The taller of them buttonholed him with a joy that was almost bursting, while the other relieved him, as one would his father, of the neat stack of volumes he had stowed away under his arm.

At which point he who had done the buttonholing fell back in apparent dismay. "Oh, I say," he began apologetically, "you aren't the man after all! We didn't meet you on a motor cycle near Como, summer before last, did we? Machine broke down you know, and we gave a fellow a lift. No, of course not. Let me introduce Mr. West, my room mate, of

Boston, class of 'teen nought. Carmichael is my name, Angus Carmichael, of St. Louis, also of 'teen nought. Hope you will forgive us, sir, for holding you up like this, Mister ——?"

The perfectly serious gray-blue eyes of the little man which had lifted to the countenance of the young gentleman who was so fervently speaking, continued to regard him unblinkingly. Then their gaze travelled to his friend. Also his jaw shot forward tentatively, and his chin, seemingly so cherubic an affair, turned into a belligerent one with its lip thrust upward and outward. There was unexpected Irish in the little man.

But the eyes of Mr. Carmichael, of St. Louis were limpid as the orbs of childhood, except that each bore an interrogation mark of waiting expectancy. Had he not asked this gentleman his name? The countenance of Mr. West also bore genial and open interest only.

The belligerence in the little man's manner changed back to mildness.

"Strange is my name, Luke Babbrage

Strange. Shall we go on? Or do you go the other way? No? I myself am here taking a post-graduate course in sociology and practical philanthropy. You say that you are from Boston, Mr. West? And St. Louis, Mr. Carmichael? While there are other Kentucky men here, so far as I have discovered, I am the only man from Louisville."

So far as the two young gentlemen striding along now with the little man between them had been able to find either. This was why they now so assiduously accompanied him in the direction he appeared to want to go. This was why they had no thought of allowing him to shake them.

At the mention of Louisville the impetuous Mr. Carmichael broke forth. "Alluring sound that place and that state have for me! It has come to be one of my dreams, waking and sleeping, to go down there.

"Take me back to old Kentucky
Where the crystal waters glint
As they dance along their borders
Through the fragrant beds of——

No, no, you are quite right, Billy, that is not at all the verse I meant.

> "Where the lasses and the horses
> Are but terms for grace and speed——

These are the lines I had in mind."

They were pausing now before the destination of their new acquaintance, but the ardour of Mr. Carmichael was unquenched.

"And I say, Mr. Strange, old chap, I hope you'll permit me to call you so — I — er — say, you are going to let Billy and me come and see you? West Divinity, are you not? It was our hope to have been in South Middle, but we didn't make it at the start. We are in Durfer. Isn't it sort of obligatory on your part to let us come, to make us feel you have quite pardoned our hold-up?"

"And one thing more to that, sir," said Mr. West, with a deprecatory dignity to be construed as a rebuke for his less restrained companion. "There is — er — a sort of select and limited smoker round at our rooms for Saturday night." It was the first his

friend Angus had heard of it. "You'll see us before that time, but I speak about it now in the hope that you will keep the evening open to meet a few of us seniors, sir?"

But Mr. West and Mr. Carmichael came to call first. That afternoon, in fact, late, in all their toggery as for afternoon tea, and they left their cards on the table as they departed.

They waylaid him on the outskirts of West Divinity at dusk the next day and carried him off into town to supper, an arm of each linked through one of his, even while his somewhat deliberate speech was in the act of formulating objections. And on the return from that tidy meal, they steered him, mildly expostulating, up to their own quarters. He was the assistant, they learned, at a large and fashionable Episcopal Church in his home city. He did not smoke, and he declined the hospitality of the foils, the gloves and the punching bag pressed upon him by Mr. Carmichael as host.

His attention as he took the pigskin easy-chair pushed toward him, seemed to be held

by the pictures. Miss Clare de Vere, in ballet skirts, and poised on one toe, hung over the mantel while Damon, son of Blizzard, the bullterrier bench-show prizetaker, surmounted the bookshelf.

But good breeding demanded that the hosts find matter of more possible interest to the guest.

"A great place that, Kentucky," said Mr. Carmichael astride a straight chair, his chin propped on its back as he devoted himself to the visitor. "An amazing proportion of our noteworthy men have come from there. A remarkable old fish, for instance, was your Admiral Mansfield Kent. He lived in Louisville, did he not?"

Talk of lightning from a blue sky! The gaze of Mr. Strange withdrew itself from Miss Clare de Vere where it seemed to be hypnotically held, and regarded Mr. Carmichael.

"He lived next door to my family there. The Admiral's father and my grandfather built companion houses, side by side over

sixty years ago. The surviving families, I am happy to say, reside in these houses still."

The chair back upon which Angus and his chin leaned gave way with a crash. He was something of a heavyweight to receive such a shock so suddenly. But only in the body did it down him.

"But, I say, old man," he went right on, arising from the fragments as the phœnix from its ashes, "it's ripping to know that a great old chap like that left survivors. Sons, I suppose?"

Something of rosiness and even of embarrassment became visible in the countenance of the guest. "Ah — er — a widow and a niece," stated Mr. Strange.

After the guest had taken his leave, Mr. Carmichael became thoughtful. In time he burst forth with the result of his reflections.

"Bill, he's got a jaw. I would not put it past him to have a fist. He's no manikin like we thought him. He's a first-rate little man!"

Mr. West added some information to this a day later. "His mother has the dough, too, Gus. Plenty of it, I gather. I had him out this afternoon and he inadvertently let out the same. The only reason we did not meet him pedaling along a road at Como summer before last was because we were not there to do so. He was. He's been over eight times since he was a kid."

Three days after this confidence, Mr. Carmichael made one in his turn. "Bill, he's all right. We are the goats. Particularly yours truly! I dropped by to jolly him a bit before supper time, and didn't he get to talking to me as if I were a brother and an equal! He said it meant a great deal to him to have had us young fellows ask him out and make him one among us. That his training and his profession hitherto had seemed to be a wall between him and young people. He sighed at this, Bill, a deep-down sigh, from the ground up. Then he turned downright confidential. He said that sometimes it was a woeful disadvantage to a man to be the

only son of a widowed mother. As near as I can make it out, she seems to have given him to the Lord off-hand, before he was old enough to have any say-so in the bargain. It was an unfilial thing to say, the dear little man went on to state, but often he had felt that he could have been altogether another and manlier type, if his mother had not gone with him through school and college and seminary. A man is entitled to refrain from his wild oats of himself, he said. I began to think he meant his mother was here with him now; but he said for the first and only time in his life she was not; that sometimes he feared he was a brute unworthy of the garb he wore, for his mother had gone into hysteria and thence to a sanitarium because he would not let her come."

Billy's jaw dropped. "Then he won't be going home for Christmas?"

"But he will be; he is. I should say there is some reason which is making him count the days to his going. He says an old family servant who acts as his mother's housekeeper

now, is there and expects him. Say, Billy, it's sort of mean to string him."

Billy, nodding, sucked on the amber mouthpiece of his briar-root thoughtfully. Then he spoke. "We've got to be straight with him, Gus."

There was silence while they both digested this. Then Angus arose, "Straight it is, old man; you're right. Thank'ee for the tip. Get your hat. Straight it is, here and now and hereafter with the Rev. Luke."

That rosy person was glad to see them. It was ten o'clock and his books and papers were outspread on his table before him.

"Look here," burst from Mr. Angus Carmichael, before he could even deposit his hat. "We're finding you are better than most, and straight, too. Straight as a string. Billy here thinks so too. I want to ask you something. Take the case of a fellow who's dead gone on a girl he has never properly met, a girl he knows by accident in such a way he can't presume on the chance acquaintance, she being quite that kind of a girl. Supposing

that chap made up to a man from her town and who lives next door to her, hoping to get an invite down there for himself and his friend? And take it that this same chap is beastly ashamed of himself, and wants to say so, what would you think he ought to do?"

And Mr. Carmichael looked the Rev. Mr. Strange breathlessly in the eye, and waited while that little man looked him steadily back, and Mr. William West rocked on the two rear legs of his straight chair and murmured in penitential refrain, "Me, too, and don't overlook it; me, too."

Then up spoke the square little man, continuing to hold the eyes of Mr. Carmichael inexorably.

"You asked me, gentlemen, Mr. West rather than Mr. Carmichael, for some data on the subject of the discobolus for a stamp on your track-team stationery. I had just finished making the notes of the same for you on that sheet of paper there when you came in. If I understand the rest of this matter aright, my young friends, — though perhaps

thirty-two and twenty are not so far removed from each other as my use of 'young friends' would seem to insist; if I understand the gist of this matter, will you spend the approaching holidays in my mother's home in Louisville as my guests? Or rather I will exact the compliance in expiation of the offense preferred by yourselves. You *will* spend the said holidays with me as my guests. I expect to leave, by the way, on the twenty-second."

There are dormitory laws at any college, West Divinity at Yale included, which are supposed to put some limit on the individual freedom. For instance if you want to howl, and it is in hours, you can howl. And if it is not in hours — why you howl just the same. Mr. Carmichael and Mr. William West howled. They were restored, set-up, once more irrepressible and incorrigible.

"Oh, I say, old man," avowed Mr. Carmichael, "you are teaching us pure religion. That's straight, not cant. Of course we'll go! You meant it, didn't you? But look

here, I might as well out with it, mightn't I Billy? We've got to leave here on the twentieth. There are reasons urgent, pressing, insurmountable reasons, if you knew them, why — — er — we ought to leave on that date and get to Louisville on ——"

"So we will then, my dear boy. Now that you suggest it, there are quite as strong reasons urging me. On the twentieth, gentlemen. And now, good-night."

It was Heels who had asked for the discobolus notes, but it was Angus who, with his usual impetuosity had put them in his breast pocket for safe keeping.

Billy seemed to himself to have been asleep for hours when he was awakened as once before to find Mr. Carmichael standing over him, that person being in the pink pajamas this time, owing to a lack of any discrimination on the part of their common washlady. Again Mr. Carmichael was talking fluently and excitedly.

"Wake up there, Heels, and hear the birds sing! I've made a discovery! It's on the

other side of the notes he gave you and it's poetry. He talks about her as a rose, a jewel, and a star! Oh, Glory: isn't this cream? It's written *to* her! It's a dead giveaway, Billy. He's gone on Miss Kent, too! It's a three-ringed rivalry, and Luke's in the lead."

"Let me see," said Billy West; and, interrupted by shouts of laughter, he sat up in bed and read:

"How should thou be a rose who art a star?
And how a star who yet a jewel art?
And how all these when deep within my heart
Thou keepest thine own image, sweet and fair?
Lady of mine, these halting verses mar
The beauty of my dream — like dust a-start
On a fair glass, or ripples that do part
The mirror of a stream, where shadows are.

"Yet will I write them! Not to meet thine eye,
Never to lay before thee as a gift,
But for my spirit's own delivery,
But for my soul's most delicate uplift!
For this imagining . . . ."

But that was all. The sonnet was unfinished. Nevertheless, as the two, overcome with the joke of this latest development, agreed, it was quite enough.

CHAPTER IV

In which three men and a maid travel to Kentucky, the minister in the lead, until an unfortunate accident restores the hero to his proper place before the footlights

ON the twentieth of December, Angus Carmichael and Billy West picked up their sumptuous "limited" in Jersey City, everything promising well for their Janic quest. Billy made a joke or two when he saw that the name of their sleeper was "Walhalla," which suggested to him the warfare of the gods; but Angus drew his attention to the fact that it also represented victory, and was therefore the best of omens.

The sleeper was full to its skylights, but empty of the young woman they sought. Although it wanted five days to the great holiday, the Christmas spirit prevailed. The

It's tough luck that she has the drawing room though."

When the damsel had vanished, and the guileless minister had turned to rearrange his packages, Mr. West undertook to make himself comfortable.

Matters inside the car were rather mixed. The upper berth, and, as a perquisite, half of the lower seats, were his by right of purchase, but he found every inch of the blue plush piled with stuff — two suit cases, a large lunch basket, a small satchel, a mysterious square box with holes punched in the top to which the attachment, by the straps, of a pair of roller skates seemed somewhat incongruous. Added to these were an umbrella and a large, tightly bandaged, shawl-strap bundle. If this was the lower berth's hand baggage, what or who was the occupant and where was the athletic Heels to disport himself for the long trip?

Presently, led by the porter there entered a small boy of not more than five or six years of age. He was equipped for travelling in

heavy ribbed black stockings, knickerbockers about as long as Heel's hands, a snug-fitting red jersey and a brownie cap of red. Around his neck, securely hung, a stout untearable tag notified in clear black letters all whom it might concern that Grover Cleveland Hamilton was to be safely delivered to his grandmother in 1994 Lakegrove Avenue, Louisville, Ky.

Grover soon proved himself. The porter had no sooner lifted him to his seat, where his short legs stuck out straight before him, than he slipped down and began to show active interest in Heels's impedimenta which had been piled on top of his own. When, after a reconnoitring absence, Mr. West returned, he found his golf sticks scattered as pitfalls for the unwary along the centre aisle, and seeing complications ahead proceeded to replace his belongings.

"Look here, Grover," he said, "I'll make a bargain with you: if you don't touch my things I won't touch yours; but if you endanger the lives of the passengers, to say nothing

of the lives of the great Pullman officials, I am going to take that square tin box with the holes all around it, and chuck it out of the window. Where's that other cleek?"

Grover Cleveland Hamilton at first seemed about to cry; then he looked his threatener full in the face, and sticking both fists into his diminutive trousers pockets, he said simply and emphatically:

"Ya — a — a!"

And Heels, knowing he had found his match, softened his manners.

"I'll tell you what it is, Old Sport, we are going to be friends. You take care of me and I'll fight for you. Where's that cleek?"

Grover was not so easily won. He cocked his head on one side, seemed about to retort, then changed his mind and walked thoughtfully down the aisle and pounded with his fist on the door of the drawing room. It was opened and through a small aperture a conversation was held, only one side of which could be heard.

"It is, too!" the small boy was declaring.

"It's under your bed. He wants it. You get it: I can't reach it. He's going to fight for me."

Then he disappeared for a second and presently they both emerged, the girl in gray with the cleek in her hand.

Heels's heart jumped. So did he. "I beg your pardon," he began. "That is mine, I believe!" That blessed Grover Cleveland Hamilton! Visions of where this opening sent by the Fates would lead, of his rivals distanced, of the *noli me tangere* tactics he would pursue in following the "All's Fair," pact, flushed through his brain.

"Oh, Grover!" the girl said with a reproachful look at the little magpie. As she handed the implement back to its owner, her smile may have meant only amusement at the diminutive traveller, or it might have meant—all sorts of exhilarating possibilities! Only, she turned back and closed the door.

"H-m!" the youth exclaimed to nothing and nobody, seeking his companions with a one-sided smile.

"Not so far ahead as you thought," greeted Angus. "Now to show you how generous I am, I propose that we join forces, all three combining and getting there together."

"What can a fellow do with a stateroom door?" asked Heels ruefully.

"Watch me," replied Angus. Then he took one of Strange's packages. "This bears the hall-mark — Grover Cleveland Hamilton, do you want some candy?"

"Help yourselves, gentlemen," said the Reverend Luke; "that candy was intended for Mrs. Binkins, our old housekeeper, but all that I have is yours."

"Thanks, awfully," said Angus; "a loan merely. We'll pile Binkins up to her eyes in candy."

The box was opened and Grover Cleveland pounced.

"Not so fast, Old Sport; don't be greedy. The lady in gray first, *mon enfant.*"

"Knock on that glass door," added Angus "and ask the lady if she doesn't want some of our candy — *ours*, mind you."

Grover Cleveland Hamilton obeyed. He knocked, once lightly, again harder; the door opened; the lady in gray looked at the child, listened, took the box of candy, and, with a sudden dipping of her head that nevertheless left a suspiciously smiling curve of cheek visible, she once more shut the door.

"Well if that isn't cool!" said Billy. "Strange, since the candy is yours — " he began.

But the Reverend Luke stopped him with a hand-wave. "It was yours from the moment you asked for it; and not being so eager nor so trustful as you two, I must decline the initiative in this affair, merely following where you lead, gathering contentedly, as it were, the stray crumbs."

"While we take the chunks? Heavens, man! Do you think we are swine? Go claim your property and take the first inning."

The Reverend Luke protested no further, but got up with apparent reluctance; tapped timidly upon the ground glass door; held a small, meek parley; waited; then led the lady

in gray and the box of candy past the two young men, through the door into the rear car.

Billy and Angus exchanged looks; then followed at a safe distance. In the very rear of the observation car, their faces to the flying landscape, their backs to the world, sat Strange and Miss Donovan affably conversing.

The conspirators returned to their own car for counsel.

"Doesn't that frazzle you?" asked Angus. "Just takes the trick with a simple twist of his wrist. We've got to combine against that little parson! What shall it be next?"

"Stray crumbs, is it?" quoted Billy.

"All that I have is yours," added Angus. "Let's take him at his word and seek inspiration in another box. Here's one that seems promising."

It far exceeded expectations. It was bunched in natural holly of extra prickliness and a broad crimson satin ribbon was tied with a quirk through a card which read: "From a grateful parishioner," holding togeth-

er a pair of extra large velvet slippers of bishopric hue ("Coming events," interjected Angus), embroidered in pansies of extreme lumpiness and violent variegations. The twain consulted.

"He'd never recover from his embarrassment — 'twould settle him for the trip."

As Fate's messenger Grover Cleveland should again be employed.

After some search the child was found on the floor of a section, his head on a shawl, looking like a baby indeed, his thumb in his mouth and sleeping. But no sentimental scruples withheld the two.

"He'll have lots of time to sleep," said Angus, unfeelingly lifting the limp form that dragged like lead, and rousing it sufficiently to make it open one eye on a suspended nickel. Grover was told what service was required, but he was a born financier.

"Free nickels," was what he said.

"Five nickels," amended Billy and showed them.

They guided his tottering steps to the

rear of the observation car until they were almost behind the chosen two; they placed the gorgeous slippers in the chubby hands and bade Grover Cleveland tell the gentleman that there were the slippers the lady he was going to marry had made for him. Then he was to get his five nickels.

Grover was nobody's fool, but he had a common failing — he could not carry a straight message. The two peeping saw him approach the pair, saw the lady turn and beam graciously upon him. It was not the first time history has been altered by the glance of beauty. To her, not to Strange Grover handed the slippers, and to Strange, he battered his message thus:

"Those two men says the slippers are for the lady he's going to marry, and to give Grover five nickels."

The lady in gray became a lady in crimson. She looked at Mr. Strange with interrogatory eyebrows over a face of mischief.

"Those boys!" he said, laughing also; and pitched the slippers overboard.

Some time elapsed before the perfidious Strange led his companion through the car, past the guilty couple and into her stateroom where they could be seen chatting unconcernedly for the remainder of the afternoon.

As dusk approached Angus sent an extravagantly formal written communication by the porter, inviting the Rev. Luke to be their guest at dinner. A prompt reply, equally ceremonious, stated that Mr. Strange had a previous engagement.

When Angus and Billy took their seats in the dining car, they discovered that the table opposite their own was especially provided with flowers and anchovy *hors-d' œuvres* and their suspicions soon found verification when Strange, in the very pink of a fresh toilet and evident pleasure, entered with Miss Nixie Donovan, who did not look at the two young men opposite, though consciousness of them was by this time brimming just below her persistently drooping lids.

Angus and Billy studied the landscape.

"Don't look at them," said the former in an undertone. "She thinks we are a couple of cowboys now. It's evident enough he knew her all the time. Friends of Miss Kent's, both of them, if we'd thought of it. He's beat us to it, Bill. From this time on, our best policy will be dignified aloofness."

"How's this for haughtiness?" asked Billy leaning his elbow on the back of his chair, and gazing in nonchalant abstraction at a spot just over Miss Donovan's head.

In the car ahead of them Grover Cleveland Hamilton had been left sleeping the sleep of untroubled innocence. He seemed good for the night. But Grover had some of the attributes of genius, one of which is unexpectedness.

Under his berth, tied to the square tin box with the perforated top, were his roller skates. By what train of thought — whether in the body or out — he conceived the idea of trying to skate on the train, only the gods can tell. Perhaps he awoke hungry and was told where to find his longed-for assuagement;

perhaps he wanted to feed the small pet imprisoned in the box he held. Be that as it may, the two friends, discussing their abundant fare in the dining car, suddenly beheld a small boy on roller skates lurch forward and fall sprawling in the aisle.

At the same moment the top flew off the tin box, and a white rat sought refuge in the gray folds of a nearby skirt.

Miss Donovan gave a shriek, and Angus sprang to the rescue. As he dropped on one knee before her, he came down with all his force on the sharp edge of the upturned box.

"Here's the brute, Billy," he said; "and give me a hand if you don't mind."

"Why you've hurt yourself!" cried Miss Donovan, alarmed at his inability to rise. "Oh Mr. Strange! Please help!"

Investigation proved that the cut was a serious one; the spurting blood suggested a severed artery.

It was Miss Donovan who assumed command. She had Angus carried, regardless of protest, to the sleeping car; she superin-

tended the staunching of the wound; and she issued orders as if she were the president of the road.

Luke Strange, finding his services superfluous, decided to apply himself to a task more congenial to his calling, and proceeded to administer consolation in bereavement to the tearful Grover who was totally unreconciled to the sudden demise of his cherished white rat.

At the first stop, a surgeon, summoned by an advance telegram, boarded the train and found a patient with a fractured patella, somewhat weak from loss of blood, divided between physical pain and delirious joy, but with every chance for a speedy recovery.

During the rest of the evening Billy West obediently fetched and carried for the girl in gray, who in her relief from serious apprehension and the restraint on her social instincts, expanded like the escaped afrite in the "Arabian Nights," devoting herself exclusively to the invalid, while Luke Strange strapped and unstrapped roller-skates, told

stories, and played nurse generally to an exacting master of six.

"Aha!" whispered Angus to Billy, when he was being made comfortable for the night. "How's that for the first touch-down? Even if I did make it with just one knee!"

CHAPTER V

At the Kent home in Louisville. Preparations for a Christmas Ball. Mr. William West makes the most of his opportunities while his friend is confined to his room. Christmas shopping and a singular conversation overheard by Jane. Mrs. Kent and Miss Donovan discuss Mr. Strange in a frivolous manner after dinner

IN the windows of the old Kent home on Broadway, holly wreaths tied with red ribbons, against a background of spotless lace, proclaimed the festive season near at hand. The stone flagging and steps were of that gleaming whiteness so dear to the hearts of good housekeepers in this smoke-ridden city, and the brass bell handle and door knobs rivalled in their brilliancy the morning sunshine.

The outside impression of well-ordered

comfort and good cheer was happily made good within, where old-time dignity and modern luxury met half way. There was neither stiffness nor overcrowding. Heavy gilt cornices and mirror frames, crystal-hung chandeliers and massive marble mantels, corresponded with lofty ceilings in the manner of sixty years ago, and about it all was that air of permanency which in these days, when the average American "breaks up" — in expressive phrase — every few years, is becoming rare.

The not unpleasing formality of the drawing room, with its heavily carved rosewood, its gold lacquer cabinets, Chinese embroideries and other trophies of the late admiral's many Eastern voyages, gave place in the library, which opened with double doors at the end of the wide hall, to the happy insouciance of the modern living room. Here, on the morning of the twenty-third, in a basket-chair of generous proportions, a cushion at his back, sat Mr. William West, on his knees a box of Christmas-tree ornaments which he

was feebly endeavouring to disentangle from a mass of clinging tinsel. At a desk across the room a lady was busily writing. Graceful shoulders and a somewhat elaborate coiffure were all that was visible when Heels, burning to make a remark, but fearing to interrupt, glanced now and then in her direction. Silence was a thing Mr. West could not endure. He was born for society. Fitfully he endeavoured to concentrate upon the work in hand, only to be further distracted by the recurring sound of feminine laughter which floated down the stairway. What were they laughing at, and why didn't they make haste?

He was asking himself this question for the twentieth time when the lady at the desk turned briskly, saying: "Did you ever hear anything like the way those girls laugh! I hope you are as patient as you look, Mr. West. They'll be down directly now."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you, Mrs. Kent," replied Billy brightening.

"I am through, thank fortune! This is

the thirty-ninth Christmas Card I have signed my name to this morning." With a stack of envelopes in her hands Mrs. Kent came forward and seated herself near him. "I like the way Jane has pressed you into service to undo the results of her own misdeeds. To think of cramming that stuff in with all those prickly things! How is your friend Mr. Carmichael to-day?"

Beaming with the joy of a released puppy Billy reported his friend decidedly better, but under orders not to put his foot to the ground for at least three days.

"We must have him up for the ball on Christmas Eve," said Mrs. Kent smiling. "We should be dreadfully disappointed if he couldn't come."

Mrs. Mansfield Kent was not, Billy reflected, exactly the sort of person Miss Donovan had led him to expect.

Naturally, after the accident the travellers had become exceedingly chummy, and of course the Kents had come in for full and free discussion, greatly to the enlightenment

of Angus and Billy. Nixie, who had not met Mrs. Kent, had the impression from Jane that she was rather — well, difficult. Nixie fancied — not that Jane had said so — that her aunt did not understand her, and that their ideas about things differed radically. From some other source Nixie had gathered that Mrs. Kent, who had been very much younger than the Admiral, had married him for his money. Angus said from what he knew of the old chap there had not been much else to marry him for.

"But anyway," Nixie added loftily, "you could understand she wasn't of the same fibre as Jane. Of course there was no *real* relationship, she was merely an aunt-in-law."

Mr. Strange, who though present, had up to this point manifested no particular interest in the characters of his neighbours, here quietly remarked that as a blood relation Mrs. Kent struck him as more desirable than the Admiral.

Because of the impression Nixie had somehow received, and also perhaps by reason of the smartness of what Jeremiah, the butler,

would have called her "entitlement," they had conceived Mrs. Mansfield Kent to be rather the conventional stage chaperon, an illusion promptly corrected by the sight of her dimple. What business had a chaperon of — say forty, with a dimple in her cheek? A charming one too. One can never tell how dimples will wear. They sometimes degenerate early into wrinkles, but Mrs. Kent's, it was plain to be seen, was a plucky dimple, courageous, philosophic; defying or rather laughing at Time, and finding opportunities in life even yet, despite the touch of silver in her abundant locks.

Not that Mr. West formulated matters thus. He perceived in Mrs. Kent a comely, genial person, not one of the sort to spoil the fun, but rather, if occasion offered, to take a hand in the game herself.

"An easy fit," Mrs. Kent's dressmakers found her, and the phrase broadly applied will serve as well as another to explain the popularity she undoubtedly enjoyed among her niece's friends as well as her own.

Now it was that she and Billy West quickly fell into a confidential chat, as she drew her chair nearer and began to help with the tinsel.

"Mr. Carmichael's being here for two whole days," she was saying, "without our catching a glimpse of him has made us quite curious to see him. From what Luke — Mr. Strange, says, he must be a most fascinating young person."

"Oh, Gus is the best ever," Billy assented enthusiastically, then he came to a dead halt as it occurred to him that Angus, without even appearing on the field, had, as wounded hero, won the first inning. His sportsman instinct asserted itself, and he resolved to pay more attention to the game.

"Luke says his high spirits are simply inexhaustible," Mrs. Kent continued. "And the way in which he has borne this really painful injury —— "

"Oh, Gus has his ups and downs like the rest of us, so far as that goes." Billy held aloft a glittering ball, his eyes fixed dreamily

upon its iridescent surface. "He's not the original Little Sunbeam," he added.

Mrs. Kent regarded him smilingly. "Mr. Carmichael can't have very much to worry him — twenty-two — good looking — lots of money."

"Yes," Billy assented, not sure just what tack he would take, but all alert for a lead. "Still one can have pretty serious experiences by the time he's twenty-two."

"Don't tell me he has been disappointed in love! How interesting."

"Worse than that," said Billy, wondering the while what was worse.

"Secretly married, and——" hazarded Mrs. Kent.

"Now, whoever told you?" Billy demanded.

"Oh, never mind — a bird — anything — anybody but you — of course not *you*."

They both laughed. Mrs. Kent presumably at her own acuteness, Billy at the thought of Angus as the victim of a mésalliance, and of how amusing he would be in this new rôle.

"Now you've got to tell me all about it," Mrs. Kent insisted, mirth still shining in her eyes. "It is the most di—I mean the most romantic thing I ever heard. Does Mr. Strange know?"

"No, no, nobody knows——" Billy stammered.

"Who is she—where does she live?" persisted the lady.

"She doesn't live anywhere—that is, she——"

"You don't mean she is *dead?*"

The swish of descending skirts broke in upon the confidence.

"I don't mean anything. You are jumping at conclusions," said Billy.

"But is she alive? Tell me that."

He shook his head. "And not a hint of this to Gus when you see him, Mrs. Kent. The minute he gets on the subject he goes nutty—all right as long as he's playing horse—but down and out as soon as he tackles love and marriage. If you *could* just drop a hint to Miss Jane, Mrs. Kent,"

Billy had just time to whisper before the two girls, all feathers and fur and gaiety, swept in upon them.

"We have kept you an unconscionable time, Mr. West," cried Jane. "But Nixie had a *very* important letter to write."

"Must have been an awfully jolly one. Don't you say so, Mrs. Kent? Wish I were going to get it. Mayn't I have the pleasure of mailing it? I'm to put Mrs. Kent's cards in the box." And Billy having at last got clear of the tinsel, shook hands with the girls.

"Too bad we didn't think about you, isn't it, Jane? but it's gone by a special messenger," said Nixie.

"Before you go I want your opinion about the tree. They'll be bringing it in presently. Where shall it be? — at the end of the drawing room, or will it be in the way of the dancing there?" asked Mrs. Kent.

"Oh, here in the library by all means," said Jane. "Have the doors closed until it is lighted just before supper. It will be ever so much more effective."

"I believe you are right. Mercy upon us! Where has the morning gone? I promised Luke I'd meet him at Blank's at 12:30 to help him select a present for the new parish house, and it is after eleven now. Jane you'll have to see about the Santa Claus outfit yourself. Mr. Mason at Gielou's is the one to go to."

It was this commission that caused Jane an hour later to separate from her companions with the understanding that they were to meet her at Blank's.

When she entered the art store they were not in evidence and remembering some photographs she wanted, she took the elevator to the second floor. Busily engaged in making her selection from a large assortment of samples arranged for convenience upon a revolving many-leafed screen, Jane suddenly became aware of familiar voices in conversation on the other side of it.

"But I know this paragon of all perfections better than you can possibly know her, my dear Luke." said Mrs. Kent, "and I

repeat what I have said before, I fear she is not the wife for a clergyman. She has a frivolous vein — believe me."

Mr. Strange's voice interrupted. "On the contrary — pardon me — she is dignity itself when she wishes to be, and her charming grace would render her — but after all, it is not the minister who wants her, it's the man."

"That's very nicely said, Luke. Sometimes — I almost —— But listen to me. Consider the difference in age — that is a valid objection at any rate. And your mother — let matters remain as they are for the present."

"Dear lady, I'll try to respect your wishes — much as I should like to argue certain points with you — until I finish my course at Yale, then, but — are you laughing?"

"I was only thinking how afraid I am of Jane. I wouldn't have her know for worlds that ——" They moved away, and the young lady behind the screen with hot cheeks and beating heart, heard no more.

She wished indignantly that she could understand Luke Strange's veneration — it

amounted to that — for Aunt Marcia's opinion. His ideas were old fashioned, and yet chivalrous too; but the idea, if he had any such — intentions — of confiding them to—— And frivolous! Not the wife for a clergyman! Well goodness knows she had no ambition to fill such a position. She had always liked Mr. Strange. He had made rather a pet of her ten years ago; but it had actually never occurred to her, that he might — well — honestly, she had thought of him as too old — over *thirty*. He had been awfully nice to her. But to have him deliberately warned against her, by her own aunt! "Afraid of Jane," indeed! How about a guilty conscience?

Jane found it difficult to decide on a line of conduct. Should she so encourage Luke Strange as to wring from him the declaration he had promised not to make? No, she was not enough of a flirt for that, besides she recognized it would be a waste of time at present — even for the sake of showing Aunt Marcia a thing or two.

When she descended to the lower floor, still with heightened colour, there were Nixie and Billy chatting with Mr. Strange and Mrs. Kent, who seemed somehow astonishingly at their ease.

As if this were not enough for one day, Nixie came to her as they were dressing for dinner, all excitement over the mysterious tragedy that shadowed Angus Carmichael, which Mrs. Kent according to instructions had passed on.

"And you'd never suspect it," said Nixie, dramatically waving her hair brush. "Lying there in the car with his knee giving him fits, he told jokes that almost finished me. And I'm perfectly crazy about his laugh! But then he may be just trying to hide his real feelings. I'm simply mad to know all about it."

To Jane life seemed for the moment to be tinged with melancholy and at dinner she was a bit absent. Just why she was so interested in this unknown person she could not imagine. To be sure she had heard enough about him in the past few days, but that

scarcely warranted the little quickening of her pulse every time his name was mentioned.

Over the coffee, in the drawing room, the conversation turned upon Luke Strange.

"I heard him preach a sermon up in Summit," Nixie was saying, "a dandy sermon. He's a perfect dream in his surplice, Mrs. Kent. His legs look oceans longer when you can't see them."

Mrs. Kent laughed (heartlessly, it seemed to Jane). "You live up to your name so delightfully, Nixie," she said.

"Oh, I suppose you mean I'm Irish. But now honestly, his legs *are* short, you can't deny it."

"Luke is not an Adonis, but his heart's all right," Mrs. Kent replied.

"Oh, yes," said Nixie, and jumping up she went waltzing around the room singing:

"His eyes they are a trifle crossed
An upper molar he has lost.
I grieve to say the top of his head
Reminds us now of Uncle Ned.
But we love him still, all this despite
For though he's Strange, his heart's all right."

"Nixie that is too bad of you. *I* think Mr. Strange is very good looking. He has a strong face," Jane said with dignity.

"Listen to Jane. What's come over the spirit of *her* dreams? Do you think I'm terribly disrespectful, Mrs. Kent?" Nixie sank in a graceful whirl at the feet of her hostess. "I forget he's a minister, you know, and I like him awfully."

"Don't fear. I shall not take you seriously," laughed Mrs. Kent. "Mr. Strange's legs may be short, but as the boys say, he gets there just the same."

"On his jaw?" suggested Nixie, tentatively.

CHAPTER VI

Shows how the wounded hero, chafing at his confinement, makes friends with Mrs. Binkins who acts as Love's Messenger, conveying flowers and unsigned notes from next door; how this lady, assisted by Mike Fahey, the policeman, connives at an act of insubordination; and how as the climax is reached, the lights go out

WHILE things were thus making progress in the Kent household, the semi-invalid next door was impotently railing at his enforced captivity.

The doctor, a human refrigerator, whose emotions had been in cold storage for half a century, had put the injured leg in plaster, with the firm injunction that it was not to be used until he gave permission.

On the best couch of the large gloomy guest room in a large empty house, with a pile of

magazines and novels at his elbow and an unlimited supply of tobacco, Angus was practically left to his fate.

Several times a day Strange and Billy came in to see him, the former full of concern for his comfort, and the latter a veritable Job's comforter in his glowing accounts of all the good times that were being missed.

Had it not been that Love found a messenger in the formidable person of Mrs. Binkins, his lot would have been insupportable. That lady sympathized through experience. She had been disappointed in love, not before, but after marriage. Her hair drawn out to a relentless knot on top, gave evidence of her complete renunciation of all feminine pride. For twenty years her emotional nature had found vent in managing the Strange household, and in following a counsel of perfection in domestic economics that made her the unpopular paragon of the neighbourhood.

When sundry small gray notes and bunches

of flowers were left at the side entrance, Mrs. Binkins delivered them perfunctorily, but gradually her interest awoke. Angus received them with such bursts of enthusiasm, and such profound gratitude to her for having conveyed them upstairs, that she began to experience the pleasure that should have been the giver's.

"And there was no message?" Angus would ask each time as he scanned the unsigned notes.

"Not a word, sir, but I reckon they're from Miss Jane Kent. Their nigger, that ain't worth killing, hands 'em in at the door, and ain't even got the manners to wipe his dirty shoes on the mat."

Then Angus would lie with the notes in his hand, and dream rapturously of Jane, of her voice with its soft Southern intonations, of the curve of her cheek, and the twinkling gleam of her eyes under the demure eyelashes. And even as he was thinking, a ringing laugh from without would cause him to crane his neck to catch a glimpse

of whirling petticoats and a saucy face under a tangle of red hair, and he would recall the tender ministries on the sleeping car, and realize that a certain tricksy little Nixie girl remained to be dealt with.

All his hopes centred on the Christmas Eve dance, and he obeyed orders with amazing docility, counting definitely upon being able to go.

The day dawned crisp and fair, there was something in the snappy snow-flaked air that would have sung Christmas to the deaf and blind. It was a time of mystery, holly, and expectation, of hurry and preparation, and the spirit of it penetrated into the silent house and to the big gloomy room where Angus lay in solitary state.

"When is the doctor coming?" he asked for the fifth time as Mrs. Binkins passed the door.

"He's on the steps now, sir. And it's a straight chair, and hot water, and cold water, and more light he'll be asking for before he gets well into the room!"

Angus's feelings dropped a degree when he saw the cold, severe features of Dr. White which refused to be warmed up by his long, sharp, red nose. Nothing seemed to exist in his presence, nothing mattered but hard, medical facts.

"Say, Doc," Angus began with forced cheerfulness, "what's the matter with taking this plaster off to-day? I'm feeling bully, honest I am, and don't you think we ought to let Nature do its own work?"

The doctor silently continued his examination.

"You see," continued Angus fervently, "I've come all the way down here for this dance to-night at Mrs. Kent's. Lots of things depend on it, awfully important things. Just get me out of this trapping and let me go to-night, and I'll promise you the time of your life the next time you come to New York."

Dr. White gave him one glance over the rims of his glasses, a glance that blighted his budding hopes.

"Mr. Carmichael," he said, "I am in no way responsible for the circumstances that led to this accident; but I am responsible for the proper healing of this wound. That plaster must remain at least a week, and while you may try to walk a little to-morrow, with the aid of two canes, I must insist upon your not leaving your room."

"But, Doc, not just for to-night?"

"That remains with you," said the doctor stiffly. "I have given my advice."

As the door closed behind him Angus shook a resentful fist, and Mrs. Binkins sniffed indignantly as she straightened the coverlet on the couch.

"Some folks has got vinegar in their veins," she said, putting things to rights as she talked. "But I wouldn't fret Mr. Carmichael, over missing them high-falutin' goings-on next door. When you come right down to think about it, it's kinder foolish, not to say wicked to lay so much stress on eating and dancing, and all that. Now there's Mr. Luke, as is studying to be a

preacher. He ain't got his mind on religion. Why he ain't opened a study-book since he come home. He don't do nothing when he's in the study, but just set in his big chair with his eyes shut and a kind of a baby smile on his face."

Angus laughed in spite of the low state of his mind.

"And then," went on his comforter, "there's that Mr. Heel or whatever his name is. If you'll excuse me for saying so, he's got the funniest manners I ever met up with! Why he don't give them young ladies time to primp up none. And it won't be no time till he's just as keen about a fresh lot."

"Not on your life, Mrs. Binkins! These are specially designed and there aren't any duplicates. Jove! but I wish this confounded leg was well. Wonder if I can hobble?"

Before he could find out Luke Strange and Billy rushed in, the latter as if storming a fort.

"Well old fellow, how you making it?" he cried. "Isn't this a day! You should see

our decorations next door, all wreaths and mistletoe and girls!" He paused. "But I say, old man, what's the matter? Does your knee hurt you? or are you worried about it?"

"Not at all," said Angus with fine sarcasm, "my health is perfect and my mind so calm that I'm about to pass into a stupor."

"What did Pills say?" asked Heels.

"Said I could walk gently about the room but not leave it. Blame his baby-coddling!"

The Rev. Luke pulled up a chair to the couch.

"I am very sorry about this, Carmichael. I wonder if we could get you over to Mrs. Kent's in a roller chair?"

"Never," declared Angus stoutly, "I draw the line at perambulators!" Then seeing the real concern in the preacher's face, he gripped his hand, and added, "I've been a confounded nuisance to you, Strange. Don't you bother about me for a second. Mrs. Binkins looks after me beautifully, and I'll be all right in a day or two."

"Well, I will tell you what we can do," said Strange. "The room back of this has a large bay window. Suppose we move your couch in there, and ask Mrs. Kent to leave the shutters open on this side of the house. In this way you can at least catch a glimpse of the dancers and the decorations."

"Oh you needn't bother," said Angus disconsolately, "I have some other things to do."

"What for one?" asked Heels.

"I think I'll put in some licks for the mid-year's in February," said Angus.

Strange smiled, and Heels howled as he dodged a well aimed slipper.

"Things will brighten up to-morrow," said the minister cheerfully. "I wonder how it would do to ask them all over here to dinner."

The plan was so enthusiastically received that he rang for Mrs. Binkins.

She arrived breathless and belligerent.

"Well it do seem a short time to ask a person to get up a dinner in, with a fool for a cook, and half a maid short, and turkeys

scarcer than hens' teeth. Still if it's your order, sir ——"

Strange laughed. "Now Binkie you know you can get up a better dinner in half a day than most people can in a week. You remember what Mike Fahey told me about your cake?"

"He's a blarneying old Irishman," said Mrs. Binkins, but the shot had gone home.

While the other two men went to their rooms to dress, Angus partook of his lonely dinner from a tray. His sorrows were slightly assuaged by the thought of the dinner on the morrow. Of course the guests would be brought up to see him, and perhaps by some adroit managing he might get a private word with Jane. Of course she would recognize him at once, and explanations would follow, and after explanations — well Angus asked only a smile from Fate to cover all the ground he had lost.

After an elaborate toilet Heels came in, fresh and glowing, flaunting a carnation in the button-hole of his evening coat.

Angus refused to look up.

"Awfully sorry, old chap," said Heels, adjusting a cuff button, and in a tone which indicated that his thoughts were elsewhere.

"All of them sent their regards, and said how sorry they were, and all that. Miss Donovan especially will miss you awfully."

"And Miss Kent?" asked Angus from the depths of his lounging robe.

"Oh she doesn't know she knows you, you see. I've never chirped about the matter."

"But don't you think she kind of suspects it? Hasn't she ever asked you if you knew a fellow at college that — that might be me?"

"Never," declared Heels, "the only person she ever asked me about was an awfully good looking big chap that lived at Montclair, New Jersey. I don't know anybody that fits, do you? And say Gus, you know we thought Strange was rather gone in that direction? Well *I* haven't seen any signs of it! Fact is I believe I've got a clear field."

"*You've* got a clear field!" exclaimed Angus, sitting bolt upright. "Well for

Heaven's sake! The great Irresistible! The original Winner! The only pimple on the pickle, I suppose?"

Heels quailed before this outburst. "Well I couldn't help your getting hurt playing hero to another girl, could I? Miss Kent and I have been thrown together a lot this week, and she hasn't minded showing me that she likes me a little. Besides — a clear field wasn't it?"

Angus refused to continue the subject, and lapsed into ominous silence, while Heels admired his beaming countenance in the mirror over the mantel, and finally took his departure. A few minutes later Strange looked in to see that his guest was comfortable, and to bid him good-night.

Left alone in the big house, Carmichael felt the clouds closing in on him. It was now nine-thirty, and at least fifteen long, miserable hours must pass before there was a chance of his seeing Jane and diagnosing the case for himself.

He tried to play solitaire, but such a

minor victory as self-defeat bored him. He picked up a book and turned the leaves idly. Presently a sentence caught his eye:

"And at all times the body can be made subject to the mind."

He read on for several pages, then lay back with his arms behind his head. "A lot they know about it," he mused to himself, "the old icicle is cocksure he's right, and this duffer who claims exactly the opposite knows that he is right. What's the truth of it anyhow?"

The sound of music brought him to a sitting posture. It was bad enough to spend Christmas Eve in a big lonesome house alone, but to be constantly reminded of the revelry next door was almost unbearable.

Holding on to the chairs and table he dragged himself into the next room. True to his promise Strange had arranged that the shades on that side of the Kent house should be left up, and Angus could catch glimpses of what was going on, both within and without.

Carriages and motors were arriving and departing, lights were flashing, and he could hear the chatter and laughter that followed the arrival of each new guest.

With a savage gesture he lowered the sash and jerked down the shades.

Once more safe on his couch, he plunged into a detective story, and managed to pass a couple of miserable hours. At the end of that time his restlessness brought him again to the side window. This time he flattened his forehead against the pane, and wistfully watched the gay gowns as they flitted across his line of vision.

Presently the music began again, and his feet tingled, and his lame knee twitched beneath its plaster.

"Oh listen, will you?" he cried to the silent room. "I've danced a thousand miles to that old tune!"

Suddenly he started and caught his breath. Across the window a golden butterfly of a girl had drifted, her face lifted to her partner, her white arm gleaming against the black of

his coat. It was Jane, and she was waltzing with Heels!

"I'll be darned if I stand it!" said Angus, with the fervour of a tragedian. "Mind over body is it? Well I'll take my chances with the duffer!"

Two minutes later Mrs. Binkins was roused from her slumbers by an imperious ring of Mr. Carmichael's bell.

Presenting herself at his door, in no very amiable mood, she was surprised to see him standing beside the dresser, madly tossing about the contents of the middle drawer, while a wild look of excited determination beamed from his eye.

"Mrs. Binkins," he began in the wheedling tone his mother had learned to distrust before he was five, "you've been awfully good to me since I've been down here. You know I've been an awful nuisance."

"Well you better set down," said she, with an eye to the practical.

"I feel cut up about not being able to get you a Christmas present. You won't mind,

perhaps, after I go back to New York, if I send you a little something, just to show my appreciation?"

Mrs. Binkins looked at him suspiciously, then she softened. "I had a cousin once that worked for a lady that lived in New York City. She had a beeret."

"A what?" asked Angus.

"A beeret, a pin for the back of your hair. You can get a tolerable dressy one for seventy-five cents."

"A barette it shall be," said Angus heartily. "And now you want to make me happy, don't you?"

Mrs. Binkins retired to the rim of her shell and waited uncertainly.

"You see I've decided to go to the ball, and you must help me."

"But oh, sir! It's so late, you hadn't orter," cried Mrs. Binkins, horrified. "Dr. White said you mustn't budge outer this room!"

"Hang Dr. White! he can go to — well anywhere he likes, but *I* am going to the ball, and you are going to help me!"

Mrs. Binkins was full of protests and alarms.

"See here, Mrs. Binkins," said Angus at last, in his most persuasive manner, "if you had a son like me — of course you are far too young — but if you did have one, would you like to see him disappointed in one of the biggest wishes he ever had in his life? All sorts of things depend on to-night, my whole future happiness, perhaps. I'll be careful not to hurt my knee. All I want is just a little waiting on, somebody to help get out my glad rags, and give me an occasional hand. You'll help me, won't you?"

There was no refusing him, and Mrs. Binkins, breathing protests and foretelling dire consequences, arranged his clothes and put the necessary toilet articles within reach, then discreetly retired to the hall and waited.

To get dressed had been Carmichael's one thought, but when he was arrayed and presented himself before Mrs. Binkins, a new difficulty arose.

"I never thought about getting down

stairs. Isn't there a servant on the place?" asked Carmichael.

"On Christmas Eve, sir?" said Mrs. Binkins reproachfully.

"Well I've got to get down," declared Angus, "if I have to slide down the banisters!"

Mrs. Binkins looked alarmed. "If you will stand quiet there on your good leg, for a minute, and quit doing them Highland flings, I'll see what I can do, though goodness knows I ain't encouraging you to all this foolishness."

"I'll await my love!
I'll await my love,
And I'll be as still
As the stars above!"

sang Carmichael with all the fervour of a virtuoso.

Mrs. Binkins passed into her own room and stood for a moment irresolute. Then taking from her bureau drawer a small policeman's whistle, she opened her window and looked carefully up and down the side street. Gaining courage from the deserted thoroughfare she put the whistle to her lips

and blew. The result was so shrill and aggressive, so absolutely insulting to the quiet of the midnight, that Mrs. Binkins promptly drew in her head, and closed the window.

It was not the mere noise of the whistle that agitated the heart of Mrs. Binkins, it was a far deeper and more romantic matter. The small whistle had been presented to her months ago by Mr. Mike Fahey, the policeman on that beat, with the earnest request that she should blow it when she wanted him. And Mrs. Binkins had sternly and scornfully refused to use it, though she was quite aware that Mike wanted to be wanted very much.

But to-night there was a reason: that wild young gentleman in the hall was threatening to kill himself if she didn't get him down stairs; and besides it was Christmas Eve, and rather lonely, and the strains of music from next door had stirred the ashes in a withered heart and revealed a glowing ember.

An imperative knock at the side door sent her scurrying down the stairs.

A very fat person in a tight blue uniform, his pudgy face full of concern and his billy firmly in his hand, presented himself breathlessly before her.

"Is it a burglar ye've caught, Mrs. Binkins?" he gasped.

"It is not," said the lady.

"Thim bad boys a-throwing snow balls at yer window, is it?"

"It is not," said the lady.

Slowly Mike's concern gave place to complaisance.

"It surely ain't me company ye're seeking?" he asked, with such an ingratiating smile that Mrs. Binkins hastened to enlighten him.

"That man ain't living, nor you might say dead neither, Mr. Mike Fahey, whose company I'd be whistling for in the dead of the night. I sent for you to do me a favour."

"Consider it did," he gallantly replied.

"There's a young New York gentleman up-stairs," said Mrs. Binkins, plunging into business, "who's got a stiff leg in plaster, and says he's going next door to the dance

if he has to slide down the banisters. He has his orders not to put his leg to the floor and like as not he's playing football with the sofa pillows this very minute!"

"And it's locking him up ye want?"

"To be sure it is not," said Mrs. Binkins, "I want you to help him down the stairs and across the yard."

"Aginst orders?" protested the servant of the law.

"Against fiddle-sticks," said Mrs. Binkins. "Neither you nor me, nor earthquakes nor tornadoes, could stop Mr. Angus from going to that ball. Listen at him singing up there now! Like as not he's dancin' too. Will you come?"

But Mike was dubious. It was one thing to grant a favour to a lady whose favour he desired in return, and quite another to assist a young gentleman to violate the orders of his physician, and perhaps cripple himself for life.

Mrs. Binkins realized that diplomacy was necessary.

"A little exercise ain't agoin' amiss with that stiff leg, and it's better for us to help him than for him to try it alone, as try it he will. You surely ain't fergittin' the kindnesses I've done *you*, Mr. Fahey, the hot coffee and on yer first round, the little snack set out when the weather's bad?"

"Fergittin' food that's fit for presidents? Not me!" declared Mike stoutly.

"And the young gentleman," went on Mrs. Binkins, "he thinks he's in love with one of them flighty-headed girls next door. He's bound he's got to see her before the night's over. Don't you ever mind the time when you thought *you* was in love, Mr. Fahey?"

"Lead the way up!" cried Mike in complete surrender.

A few minutes later a hilarious party of three descended the broad stairs. In the centre a young man in evening dress, with one arm about the neck of the policeman, and the other about the neck of the housekeeper, hopped from step to step, punctuating his

progress with remarks that threatened to render his assistants useless.

"For shame on you, Mr. Angus, a mocking the doctor like that!" cried Mrs. Binkins at the bottom step as she wiped away the tears of laughter. "Don't you ever let on to Mr. Luke who it was helped you down. I don't know what's come over me and Mr. Fahey to countenance such proceedin's."

The side door bell rang, and Carmichael grasped Mike's arm.

"Hush, don't let anybody know I'm here. I want to surprise the crowd next door."

In the entry Mrs. Binkins found a coloured waiter bearing a large tray of delicacies.

"Mrs. Kent says dis heah is fer de sick gem'man, an' she's powerful sorry he can't come to de party," was the message delivered.

Mrs. Binkins hesitated but for a moment, then with a quick backward glance at Mr. Fahey in the dim hall, she shamelessly allowed the crowded tray to be deposited in the pantry, and softly closed the door upon it.

The passage across the yard was slowly

but successfully accomplished and Angus was safely landed in the Kents's side hall, and left to his fate. He was quite unnoticed by the servants engaged in the final preparations for supper. Supported by two canes he limped eagerly forward in the direction of the music, chuckling to himself at the prospect of his reception; in a moment more, through a swinging door, he emerged upon the festive scene. The music, the laughter, the flying figures, the brilliant colours, the warm air heavy with the fragrance of flowers went to his head like wine. He paused irresolutely—somewhere in this merry crowd was *Jane* and he must find her and——

He heard a clock striking; a voice near by said "now." With a crash the music ceased and every light went out.

CHAPTER VII

The Christmas Ball — showing the Rev. Mr. Strange in a new light, and discovering to Jane in an unexpected manner her knight of the suit case

IT had been an unfortunate conjunction of events that prevented Luke Strange from leaving the parish house until eleven o'clock. After the Christmas celebration for the children had been accomplished the aged rector had drawn him into the study and insisted upon evoking the ghosts of dead and gone Christmases.

The Rev. Luke was kindly and sympathetic but it was with a sigh of relief that he at last stepped briskly out into the starlit, frosty night and started for the Kent ball. What with the keen nip in the air, and a certain inward thrill of expectancy, he was as rosy as a Christmas cherub, when the door

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at the Kents's opened to his step on the veranda.

Was it any wonder that the reverend gentleman blinked, as with floors gleaming beneath the feet of the couples tripping it in hallway and drawing-room, and electric bulbs shrouded in holly, and sconces filled with candles gleaming above, the whole of the festive scene burst upon him?

One almost would have said he cut a neat pigeon wing to the music, which chanced to be the "Merry Widow," as he made his way in to the wide stairway to go up to the dressing-room. But no, it could not have been a *pas seul* on the part of so earnest a wearer of the cloth. Rather it was a bit of agile execution to get out of the way of a plump little girl in rosy gauze, and her tow-headed partner, both of whom, or so it seemed, but yesterday had shouted the golden text in unison from the front bench of his infant class.

It made him realize how well along in years he was getting. But since the realiza-

tion seemed to be accepted by him cheerfully, it was evident that he bore no grudge against Time.

Formality had ceased early in the evening and when Mr. Strange returned down stairs to make his way to Mrs. Mansfield Kent, he found her momentarily alone, comely and content, the embodiment of a pleasing enjoyment of the moment and the young people.

He had never seen her looking so well, or perhaps quite so complete a woman of the world. An impressive evening gown and jewels no doubt tended toward both results.

She smiled in welcome. "Really, Luke, you look like a nice rosy boy. It is even reprehensible in you, considering your claims to years and calling. It evidently is a case with you of the company you keep. Those two nice boys ——"

"Rosy is as rosy does," said the little gentleman, stoutly. "I spent a vigorous portion of the afternoon hunting roses for Jane and Miss Donovan. Did my flowers come for you?"

"They did, Luke. Mauve orchids. I have only just laid them on the table here. Extravagant boy that you are! But well chosen they are, admirably chosen, Luke, seemly, dignified, matronly ——"

"Come now," said Mr. Strange.

"I can't," rejoined his companion. That she was enjoying herself and also him, and that largely, was evident. "I can't come; Jane is coming instead, threading her way across the room to get you. She *is* pretty! See her smile, and her pretty air to Mr. West as she passes him. She is coming to get you, to endeavour to give you a good time. She announced at dinner that she meant to do so. It is base in me to tell it. Her idea seemed to be that you had never had your chance at the things that properly constitute a good time. 'His share always seems to be you older people, Aunt Marcia,' was the way she put it. With this for a cue, unworthy woman that I am to my niece to tell it, I thought that you might do more with your opportunity." Her laughter was contagious.

"I shall, I shall, I will, I thank you," said Mr. Strange. "But even so, considering what my years actually are, I can but disport myself beseemingly, even with Jane. With your permission, my dear lady, I will help myself to a blossom of the hue you pronounced middle-aged and staid, and don it as a reminder of my actual condition."

Whereupon the doughty little man, detaching a blossom from her bouquet, pulled it through the buttonhole of his high-cut coat, just in time to take Jane's proffered hand when she reached them.

That young lady was in unusually high spirits. The consciousness of a very becoming gown, and the fact that she was the most eagerly sought dancer in the room brought an added sparkle to her eyes. Besides when a girl overhears such a confession as she had heard that morning, it can but cause her to regard the confessor in a new light.

"Such roses!" she exclaimed with mounting colour. "Nixie's crazy about her Killarneys,

but you must have known the kind I loved best."

"I know the kind you most resemble," said the Rev. Luke with a bow.

Jane hastened to change the subject: "Isn't it too bad about poor Mr. Carmichael's not being able to get over? Nixie is so superior because she knows him, and Aunt Marcia and I don't. I was so hopeful that he could come that I have saved him a dance on my card."

"Mayn't I claim it?" asked Mr. Strange.

"But you don't dance," said Jane.

"Neither can Mr. Carmichael," put in Mrs. Kent, biting her lip to hide a smile.

"Who said I didn't dance?" demanded Mr. Strange.

"Why — why do you?" asked Jane.

"If anyone were willing to — er — rehearse a bit with me, I might perhaps."

"Take him along, do, Jane. There's nothing for you young things like being to yourselves."

Some minutes later Jane and the Rev.

Luke stood on the landing of the broad stairway which was made inviting by a deep window seat, a wealth of palms, and a dignified old grandfather's clock which announced that it was eleven minutes to twelve.

Miss Kent with her draperies caught at either side and outspread, somewhat after the fashion of that Miss Clare de Vere whose picture not long since had held the attentive gaze of Mr. Strange, was pausing in her exposition of the terpsichorean art, to make suitable explanations.

"I'll show you the barn dance while we wait for Mr. West to get into his toggery. He will make a splendid Santy, don't you think? The lights will go out at a second or two before twelve, and he is to slip down and take his place in front of the library doorway so as to be part of the effect when the lights flare up.

"But now the barn dance. It is a local variation used by our crowd, and we are going to dance it right after supper, which follows the tree. Oh, yes I will dance with

you! If you can catch the trick of the steps you may cut in on any partner I have, and claim it. Three steps to the front and spring forward so." Jane's gold slippers twinkled as she did so, cleverly enough. "After which you snap your foot up and land back as at first. We call the first spring the jeté the second the coupé."

"Exactly," from the gentleman regarding the performance earnestly and absorbedly. "To be sure. The jeté and the coupé."

"And that done," tutored this would-be Genée, looking at him to see if he grasped the idea, as she suited the action to the word, "we glide forward — so — we call it the glissade — and then we — er — kick, once ——"

An anguished if hoarsely cautious whisper from above interrupted the instructions. It was the voice of the pseudo Santa Claus, Mr. West.

"Oh, I say, somebody come up here! I can't get the strings to this confounded beard untied with all this padding and paraphernalia on me. They are in a hard knot."

Jane and the minister rushed to the rescue, but the knot proved obdurate.

"Cut it," Jane implored, "time is almost up. I'll fix it somehow, I'll pin it on with hair-pins."

"Pin it on to what? To me?" demanded the victim.

"To the wig, where the two meet. There, that'll hold! Heavens! it's striking twelve; there go the lights!"

Billy sprang down the steps, and Luke and Jane followed cautiously, making their way to the front hall where Mrs. Kent had succeeded in corralling the laughing crowd.

"If his whiskers will only stay on!" whispered Jane laughingly as she turned an expectant face toward the rear door.

At that moment the lights flashed up, and she beheld, standing before a resplendent tree, in the center of the arch, with "Merry Christmas" in letters of fire over his head, not the expected Santa Claus, but her unknown Knight of the Suit Case!

CHAPTER VIII

The Christmas Ball continued. Mr. Carmichael finds himself at a disadvantage, and seeks an opportunity to explain

FOR one ghastly moment Mr. Angus Carmichael stared into the strange faces crowding the hall and doorways. They were all turned toward him, and all expressed unbounded astonishment.

Then, as he grasped the significance of the hour, the lights, and the tree, and caught a glimpse of Billy West's amazed countenance in its entanglement of white whiskers, he rose to the occasion and understood.

"Well!" he said. "I didn't expect all this! I've gotten into the wrong box, evidently. Come here, Billy West, and get on your job."

There was a moment's silence, then a hubbub of exclamations, in the midst of

which Luke Strange, seconded by an instantly comprehending hostess, captured his truant guest and guided him safely to a sheltered nook in the hallway where he established him in a large easy chair, with his foot on a rest before him.

And there, promptly, Carmichael realized that his arrival had been in every way inopportune.

Notwithstanding the temporary interruption of the programme, it was the tree, a-glitter and ablaze that was the obvious centre of attraction; and Angus, anchored in his alcove, and completely out of the current, with his legs trembling from his recent exertion, himself, also, a trifle embarrassed in the presence of so many strangers, acknowledged that he had made a mistake in coming at all.

Mrs. Mansfield Kent, to be sure, had been all gracious solicitude, and Nixie Donovan had hovered about him with a delightful proprietary air, but Jane Kent had not come near him.

From where he sat he could watch the

dismantling of the tree, about which Nixie was darting and fluttering like a red-headed woodpecker. There was something irritating in the way the Rev. Luke Strange pranced about, distributing ribbon-tied packages, while it was positively wrath arousing to see Billy West, whose genial aplomb it would be impossible to exaggerate, luxuriating in the rôle of Santa Claus.

And Jane? Where was Jane? Quietly busy there with the others, not arch and fluttering as he always thought of her, but like a butterfly whose wings are tired and a bit drooping, and folded. Nor did Jane ever once look his way.

Then he, gloomily regarding the scene from the hallway where he sat with his footstool and his wrath, and feeling himself to be forsaken, and worse, *de trop*, saw another thing. He saw Billy West pick up a package and heard him unmistakably repeat the name of Carmichael, with even a nod toward himself as he passed it to that prancing distributer, Strange. Whereupon Nixie Donovan, after

exchanging a quick and meaning glance with Heels and Jane Kent, snatched it from the hands of Mr. Strange and melted away with it into the crowd.

But he forgave her the apparent appropriation of his property, when at last he saw her coming toward him with Jane Kent.

"It's a case of Mahomet and the Mountain," she was saying with a laugh. "Mr. Carmichael let me introduce you to——" then she paused. An unmistakable flash of recognition had passed between her companions.

"I believe you two have been talking over the telephone, or flirting at the windows!" she accused, then caught herself up contritely. "Oh I beg your pardon, Mr. Carmichael, I am awfully thoughtless. *I* know and Jane knows, and we are awfully sorry. Jane shall stay and eat supper with you, since I can't. Oh, yes you will, Jane. I know you told Mr. West you weren't going to make an engagement for supper, but this is different, isn't it Mr. Carmichael?" And with a flutter of skirts she was gone, leaving Angus and

Jane with the little supper-table and an uncomfortable silence between them.

Jane was turning things over in her mind. Since this guest of Mr. Strange's and her Knight of the Suit Case were one and the same, then it naturally followed that her delightful partner in that memorable episode was none other than he of the blighted past and the inconsolable affections told of by Mr. West. Of course she felt very sorry for him, but he needn't have put up such an elaborate bluff on that hilarious trip to Summit. It would be difficult now to get the acquaintance back to the proper dignified footing, especially when she remembered how he had carried her slippers and dressing sacque in his pockets!

She decided to refer casually to their former meeting, express surprise at his unexpected acquaintance with Mr. Strange, and from this time on be very, very sorry for him.

And this was why the unsuspecting Angus could get no hold on the situation at all. Gone was the come and go of Miss Jane

Kent's dimples, and the devil take him if there was the least trace or hint of that archness visible which ten minutes since she had been indiscriminately lavishing on West and Strange. Indeed her manner was that of a nice sister, kindly, forbearing, concerned.

Even the star sapphire on her white hand which he had come to think and dream of in connection with her, seemed waned in its fire to a chastened luminary.

She was the embodiment of demureness as she got up, came around and picked up his napkin which he did not know he had dropped.

"Oh! I say, this is too much," protested Angus, but she was insistent.

"Of course I will," she said soothingly. "It was awfully good of you to come over to-night. We all realize how hard it must be for you at a time like Christmas."

"Oh it wasn't so slippery," said Angus, "and I was coming in on the home run beautifully when the lights went out."

"I don't mean that," said Jane, determined to establish things on a new footing. "I

mean all this jollity and festivity. It's awfully brave in you. We all admire you for the effort."

"How so?" from the protesting object of so much pity. "It's the other thing *I* couldn't stand, being over there by myself when the bunch was over here, with the music playing all my favourite waltzes, and another fellow beating my time."

She looked at him sweetly, with somewhat the tolerant air of one humouring a person who is ill by allowing him to talk against time. Then she seemed to think she must take care of him some more.

"Hadn't you better let me or the waiter cut that up for you, Mr. Carmichael? Your pâté, I mean?"

"Say, you know," expostulated Mr. Carmichael, "it isn't my arms, they are not out of it, it's my knee. And — er — say, speaking of knees," — it was far-fetched and unworthy of him, but he had to get in somehow — "would you say that it was a fore-shadowing of things to be, that that accident on the way

down here to Kentucky should have put me on my knees — "

For the first time Miss Kent seemed human: her colour rose a trifle and a sparkle came in her eyes. She quite forgot, too, to be sorry for him.

"Put you on your knees to Miss Donovan, you mean?" she asked sweetly.

"Now I'll venture Bill gave you that," said the disgusted Angus. "As if I had to come all the way to Kentucky to pursue a girl who lived in Jersey. If it's not patent what I came down here for — why —— "

"Really," said Jane Kent, "I'd drop that if I were you. It isn't necessary with every girl, especially when she knows the truth and is quite ready to sympathize."

"Exactly," said Carmichael enthusiastically, "if I could feel sure that you do know the truth, that for me there is, ever has been, and for all time ever will be but one —— "

"Of course, of course, dear Mr. Carmichael," agreed Jane soothingly, "and I can't tell you how much I admire you for it. I think

constancy is one of the most beautiful things in the world. That's why I hate to see you jollying a girl, just because she wants to be your good friend."

"It's not jollying," returned Angus, indignantly. "Do you think it's hot air when I tell you that I have been fairly living on those roses and little unsigned notes that have come to me every day?"

"What notes?" asked Jane.

He looked at her reproachfully; then deliberately, even dramatically, drew forth a card from his vest pocket. The pencilled words upon it were blotted and blurred.

"Your tears, or hers?" inquired Jane after a glance at the card.

His gaze conveyed more reproach. "The roses were kinder than you, for it is their tears, if you are going to have tears. Don't tell me that the writer of those words did not mean them?"

"I have no doubt but she did," said Miss Kent, rising. "The writing chances to be that of Miss Donovan. I will manage that

"Your tears, or hers?" inquired Jane after a glance at the card

she shall drop over here again presently, and you can ask her."

She was gone, and Angus was left, wondering bitterly why he had ever been born. He gazed beyond the palms and lights and flitting figures with eyes from which all joy had fled.

Then a determination seized him. He had to get the straight of the tangle, or he would know the reason why. Drawing forth the fateful card with its blurred message of cheer, and turning it over, he wrote upon its reverse side with the little pencil on its cord which had become detached from Jane's dancing card,

"Won't you give me an opportunity to explain?

"A. C."

"Methinks I've seen it before," cried a cheery voice at his elbow as Nixie Donovan held out her hand for the small gray missive. "You see I thought it was my duty to cheer a suffering fellow traveller — I'll take it, thank you. Jane said you had a message for me. 'Won't you give me an opportunity to ——' Certainly I will. I can't stop now

though, dear boy. We all know more than you fancy we do, and we consider you the finest ever to face it so pluckily. I'll be back to hear all about it. They are getting together for the barn dance now, and I have promised it to Mr. West. Jane is to lead off ——"

And Nixie Donovan lissome and flashing, akin to the Irish fairies, red head and all, was gone to take her place in the line of couples in the drawing room.

Jane was to lead, but with whom?

Mrs. Mansfield Kent, who at this moment came out and took her place beside her guest, did not know.

But as events proved, Mr. Strange did. Amid the shouts and the plaudits of the company, he calmly put aside the tow-headed young gentleman, who but yesterday had shouted the golden text from the front bench of the infant class.

"Jeté, coupé, glissade, kick," said Mr. Strange firmly, "Miss Kent irrevocably promised herself to me, Johnny Keat."

And with the neatest bow possible, the

Rev. Luke, to some purpose the model little boy pupil at dancing school in his day, gallantly lifted his partner's hand, jéte-d coupé-d, and neatly glissaded off, the shouting line in his train, following.

The front door had closed on the last guest and Nixie and Jane and Billy had come back to join Mrs. Kent and Angus and Luke Strange in the hall.

"Jane," said Mrs. Kent, "I call this shabby. Here is Mr. Carmichael's gift from the tree which I have found, undelivered and forgotten behind this lamp."

There was a moment of palpable silence, followed by hurried vivacity and irrelevant enthusiasm from three sources.

"Really, Aunt Marcia, did you ever see people have a better time?"

"Simply grand," from Nixie. "Honestly Mrs. Kent it was a perfectly be-yew-ti-ful party!"

"Ripping," added Billy.

Mrs. Kent looked from one to the other with some amiable indignation. "It only

remains for you, Luke," she said, "to talk about the weather."

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Kent," broke in Angus, "they haven't slipped my trolley. What about the present?"

"It — it didn't suit," said Nixie. "It was all my fault. I selected it before I knew, and then I forgot to change it after we heard——"

"Heard what?" demanded Angus.

Everyone paused in embarrassment, then Jane stepped firmly into the breach.

"Heard about your trouble. It is a little ash-tray, representing Cupid hammering away at a broken heart. Of course when Mr. West told us of your terrible loss —— "

Angus shot a glance of quick suspicion at Heels who had buried his face in a cushion, and was evidently undergoing a convulsion.

"What did I lose?" asked Angus.

"I am afraid we have all been dreadfully tactless," said Mrs. Kent. "You evidently didn't wish it known, but Mr. West spoke to us in the beginning about the sad history of your young wife."

Angus glanced at the concerned faces about him, then at the prostrate Heels in the background.

"The saddest page in my history spells Billy West," he said, rising with the aid of his canes and some spirit. "I'll give him just five golden moments to explain matters, or I'll gently but firmly remove him from the face of the earth!"

When explanations, broken by shrieks of merriment, were over, and good nights were being said, Angus found the opportunity he yearned for.

"Miss Jane," he begged as he held to the hand she had given him for parting, "it was crazy of me, I know, to think you had guessed who it was next door; but when the flowers came I wanted them so to be from you—I——"

"It's half past three," cried Mrs. Mansfield Kent; "you youngsters shall not stay up another moment. Off to bed, every one of you."

But Angus lingered: "Just a second, please, Miss Jane. Promise me, won't you? Give me one more chance to explain?"

CHAPTER IX

Relates a conversation between Nixie and Jane, in the course of which they agree to unite forces, and afford Mr. Carmichael the opportunity he desires

AT ten o'clock the next morning, Nixie, in flowing flowery draperies, danced into the room where Jane sat before her dressing table, a braid of chestnut hair falling over each shoulder.

"Hello, Golden Brownie," said Nixie, wafting her a kiss blown from her finger tips. "No, not a brownie either but a Marguerite in a kimono. Are these the jewels Faust has sent?"

A deep square purple box filled with violets, its lid and wrappings beside it, stood upon the dressing table. Jane coloured, then because she had coloured, she pushed them toward Nixie.

"'Mr. Angus Carmichael,'" read that person. "'In grateful acknowledgment of the opportunity to explain.' Well, now, I like that! Is this appealingly handsome young person less naïvely honest and open than he seems? I don't know what it is all about in your case, and I don't ask to. Only, when the two girls he is baiting run in couple, he ought to vary the bait. He seems to revel in opportunities to explain. Look at this."

It was a blurred and blotted card she held up, with a message written on its other side. Jane knew its one face and now she read the other.

"He delivered it himself to me out of his own hands, the writing hot from the making," said Miss Donovan, succinctly.

It would seem as if the light and colour faded a bit from Jane's face that had looked so youthfully buoyant across those violets. Did Jane care?

On the contrary it was as powder to a youthful war colt in the case of Miss Donovan. "He's flirting hard with the two of us, Jane.

Of course we got to be pretty good friends on the trip down, and after his sprain I did waive ceremony and take care of him. Still, since I'm beginning to understand something of the gentleman — Jane, tell me or not, as you choose, — was not Mr. Angus Carmichael holding your hand last night at parting, and making incipiently tender speeches to you, with that palm for a chaperon?"

There was colour enough in Jane's countenance now. She was not the niece of that doughty old salt and also pepper-box, the Admiral, for nothing. Had not Mr. Carmichael held her hand? Had he not made incipiently tender speeches? And worse, had not she on the only two occasions she had had the pleasure of this young gentleman's society, too easily succumbed to a winning manner, and a seemingly honest rush of impetuous enthusiasm?

"Exactly. I see that he did," said the astute Miss Donovan. "Now I must say I deserve all I get, always, but in this case you

don't. You have not done one thing, but be Jane Kent, to lead him on. And you are not responsible for that much of it. He is playing the game with both of us, our young friend is."

Jane agreed. "I did think he was flirting when I thought he was married."

"Flirting! Why he's a specialist. I wonder if it was a toss up as to which of us should get the violets? Fancy my Lord Hamlet Carmichael cogitating, 'To Jane, or not to Jane?'"

The thought was palpably distasteful to the lady of the violets. She pushed them away, and flinging her loosened braids back, began to brush their glorious abundance vigorously.

"Let's get even with him by ignoring him," she said. "Let's agree to leave him entirely and serenely alone."

"Oh, *no!*" Nixie protested from her position on the couch, her slippered feet tucked up under her, Turkish fashion. "Where would our fun come in then? My idea of the game

is worth two of that — only I'm afraid you'll never agree to it, Jane; your heart's too kind; you'll never put it through. You will? You promise? Very well, then — just to flirt with him if he's so anxious; follow any lead he makes us; bring him to the point of actually proposing to both of us before he gets away from here, and both of us accept him, and then see what the young man will do! When I think of all the things he said on the train, I have no earthly compunctions!"

Perhaps it was the thought of these speeches to Miss Donovan that removed any compunction on the part of Jane also.

"What's the idea for the start?" she asked briefly, as she coiled her hair.

"This is Christmas Day," said Nixie. "They leave here for the East on the second. We haven't too much time to get busy. We are going over there for mid-day dinner to-day. Of course he won't be going to the Darwins's cotillion to-night, as he can't dance, and we will. But he will be going to some of the afternoon teas and things. We will

be meeting him everywhere. Didn't Mr. Strange say something about having us all at the parish house? I'll tell you it shall be turn about. I'll give you to-day. You let me have to-morrow. Cheer up, Jane, my child, this is sport we are planning, not penance as your looks imply."

"Of course," said Jane. But her way of saying it betrayed an effort, and lacked gusto. She could not believe it of this nice Angus. She hated to believe it. And yet — on the dresser before her lay two cards, and Jane straightened. Certainly they would join forces in affording Mr. Carmichael an opportunity to explain.

CHAPTER X

In which the entanglement of Mr. Carmichael progresses, and Miss Donovan scores a point

ONE Arachne is usually quite enough to entangle any unsuspecting gentleman fly, and with two spinning webs for his destruction poor Angus was doomed.

Jane had apparently, without effort, already ensnared other victims in the persons of Rev. Mr. Strange and Mr. William West, and now while she seemed systematically to beat a retreat from any advance on the part of Mr. Carmichael, she lost no opportunity of throwing smiles and favours in the direction of the other two.

At the Strange dinner on Christmas Day, Carmichael found that his amazing lady had changed over night. She thanked him for his flowers with such sweet abstraction, that

he felt as if he had been talking into a telephone when there was no one at the other end.

At table she chose a seat next to Mr. Strange, and afterward retired to a corner with Billy West for a private tête-a-tête.

It was then that the baffled Carmichael was roused to satire. It was a weapon with which he was not skilled, but he was desperate. As Jane swept past him in her newest empire gown the becomingness of which was evidently appreciated by her partner, Angus turned to Mrs. Mansfield Kent.

"Westward the course of empire takes its way," he observed bitterly.

That lady elected to twist his meaning into a matter of fashions: "It does look strange at the start," she was saying, when Carmichael who had been half listening, interrupted:

"Luke Strange at the start! He's in at the finish, too. Look there now will you, she's got them both!"

Later in the day he succeeded in getting a few minutes with Jane alone. It was on

the pretence of asking her about the family portraits in the library, and since he had her there she refused to talk about anything else, but stood, facing the wall, delivering information like a wholly preoccupied cicerone.

"Up to this generation," she said, "there have always been two sons in the family, one a clergyman and one a distiller."

"So that's why they hang in pairs," Angus said. "One sheep and one goat. Talk about being fixed at Court!"

"Don't you think it rather explains Mr. Strange, too?" Jane asked. "You see, he's the only one of his generation and he has to be all of it. Really he's awfully jolly, you know. Wasn't he dear in the barn dance last night?"

Angus with difficulty curbed his irritation. He longed to deride the Rev. Luke, to give vent to his spleen by withering comments on his infantile performance. But he liked Strange, and loyalty silenced him.

"Oh His Chubbs is all right," he said,

gloomily. "He is the real stuff and — the girl that gets him will be mighty lucky."

"Do you think so?" she asked demurely, looking him straight in the eyes; then they both laughed, either without knowing why.

"Awfully absorbed in the portraits," cried Nixie popping her head in at the door. "We are going, Jane, Mrs. Kent says to hurry — that visitors have come."

From this time on Angus Carmichael limped over to the Kents's house at all hours, and when he could not get Jane, Nixie saw to it that he got Nixie.

If the cool aloofness of Jane's gold-flecked eyes baffled him, the riot of wayward, dancing flames in Nixie's beckoned him on. And Angus Carmichael was not a person to slight life in any direction. A gay "come hither" in dancing eyes found a prompt "go after" in his own.

Being in ignorance of the every-other-day arrangement, Angus was constantly complicating matters by following the wrong lead, and his emotions suffered a severe strain under this kaleidoscopic existence.

But ignorance of the law does not secure exemption from the penalty, as was brought home to him after having devoted himself exclusively to Jane Kent on an evening which the calender marked as Nixie's.

The next morning he sat, hat and cane in hand, in the bay window at the Stranges's wondering how early a fellow might venture to call on two young ladies whose sleeping hours were being curtailed at the wrong end. The narrow cross-section of the drawing room which caught his eye as he looked over idly, was untenanted, and would probably be so for another hour, he reflected gloomily. Then he straightened up, suddenly at peace with life once more, for Miss Nixie Donovan, in a dainty blue morning dress had crossed his line of vision.

In a moment she reappeared, this time pausing and inspecting a paper which she held in her hand. The contents were evidently amusing for she smiled, then shook her head.

The important fact being established that

somebody was up, Angus lost no time in presenting himself.

When the servant ushered him into the drawing-room it was apparently empty, but Angus perceived a gleam of gold in the corner, and discovered Nixie's bent head, poring over a slip of paper which lay on a table before her.

Now the document that Nixie was studying so assiduously bore in her own chirography the following schedule:

Dec. 25th.

Jane Kent
Nixie Donovan
Plaintiffs.

vs.

Angus Carmichael
Defendant.

December 25 — Jane's Day
" 26 — Nixie's Day
" 27 — Jane's Day
" 28 — Nixie's Day (Jane poached).
" 29 — Jane's Day (Nixie intends to poach if A. C. is poachable. Query, how?)

So absorbed was Nixie in her missive that it was not until Carmichael stood before her that she was conscious of his presence. With a start and gasp she crushed the paper in her hand and dropped her head upon it, shaking with laughter.

Angus stopped as if flagged by a red danger signal.

"Why Miss Nixie," he said impetuously, mistaking her mirth for grief, "what's the trouble? Bad news?"

The genuine solicitude of Angus's tone gave Nixie an inspiration. She would create a trouble for herself, and by so doing gain his sympathy. If only the butler would forget to announce his arrival! Or if Jane could not get her gown hooked in time to come down!

In the meanwhile Nixie's shoulders continued to heave, while she searched in vain among her many blessings to find one that might be temporarily converted into a grief.

"You can tell me, you know," Angus was

whispering consolingly, "I'm a regular oyster. Maybe I can help you out some way."

Nixie shook her head.

"Was it bad news?" he persisted, "something wrong at home? Oh! I beg your pardon, perhaps you'd rather not tell me."

He started to beat a retreat, but she stretched forth a detaining hand.

"Don't go, please," she said in an instant panic, "I'll tell you in a minute. I — I — don't know how to begin."

Angus waited, while she succeeded in working herself up to the proper tragic mood.

"You see it's my father," she said at last, improvising rapidly. "How would *you* feel if your father were going to be married to a perfectly horrid actress, young, beautiful and — perfectly horrid."

"Miss Clare de Vere!" said Angus with conviction.

"I don't know her name," said Nixie; "but she's trying to marry my darling old dad. I don't care if they do say he's a man of iron,

I *know* how soft he is. Why he can't even fasten his own cuff buttons, and I always have to fix his ties. And now just because I've come away and left him for a little while, somebody else has taken my place!"

Again her feelings overcame her, and Angus felt called upon to administer comforting pats to the little hand that lay in his.

"If he marries her I shall kill myself," announced Nixie, passionately, trying to recall the expression worn by "Lady Macbeth."

"No you won't," said Angus firmly, "you mustn't get any such notion as that into your little head."

"But I will, I will!" she cried, her hands clinched. "Nobody cares what becomes of me! There isn't a soul in the world that cares."

"Why there is," said Angus, an easy victim. "You know I'd care a lot."

"Would you, honest?" asked Nixie, "and — and would you help me sometime if I needed you dreadfully?"

"Well rather," said Angus, emphatically. "You just call on me and I'll come."

"You do care then!" said Nixie, "and there isn't anything else in the wide world that matters!" and grasping his hands across the little lacquer table she smiled at him with such sudden radiance that he gasped for breath.

"I beg your pardon," said a cool voice from the door-way, as Jane paused with one hand on the curtain, ready for flight, "I — I — thought ——"

"It's all right, Jane," said Nixie, scrambling to her feet. "Mr. Carmichael did call for you. I am just keeping up his spirits while he waits," and giving her chum one mischievous glance between her fingers, she fled precipitately.

Angus with a crimson wave mounting to his temples, was left to his Nemesis and after a hopelessly perfunctory call took his departure, savagely wondering what catastrophe was left to befall him.

CHAPTER XI

In which the truth of the situation begins to dawn on Mr. Carmichael, in consequence of which he asserts himself, and wins one blissful afternoon

NOTWITHSTANDING the uneven course of Mr. Carmichael's love affair, he and Mr. William West assured each other many times a day, as they had done many times in the past, and would probably do many times in the future, that they were having the time of their lives.

The two visitors from Yale might have been from Mars or Heaven, so royal was their entertainment.

In spite of Angus's double handicap of a stiff knee and a conspiracy, he was managing to hold his own. It was not half bad to be fussed over and sympathized with, and the distinction of having the prettiest girls at

the parties eager to sit out the dances with him, made up for a great deal.

Only one thing troubled him, his progress with Jane Kent resembled that of a certain antique gentleman named Tantalus — whenever he began to talk to her someone interrupted, a previous engagement always forestalled his request, or a pressing duty called her away.

Meanwhile Nixie maintained with him the air of a special secret understanding; and Angus, seeking consolation, and not considering consequences, laughingly acquiesced.

It was not until he caught a bit of by-play at the Glee Club concert that he began to realize the situation. It was the one occasion for which he had been able to secure Jane, and what was his chagrin on taking his seat to find that the positions had been shifted, so that he was next Nixie, and Billy was with Jane.

"We put you on the aisle, old chap, so you would have more room," explained Heels with a side glance at Nixie, whose eyes

moment.

He sulked all evening, in
was not a decent number or
that glee clubs were a bor
theatre was abominably stuf

On the way home, the par
and it was not until th
Kents's that he managed
in an undertone:

"It's a beastly shame that
five seconds alone with you.
to give me another show, are

If it had not been for th
viously unhappy evening he
would not have taken the t
the game.

Next day for the first

and as she said nothing to the contrary, it was evident that they were going alone.

"You know you said you had such a lot of letters to write," she said to Nixie. "And then you might like to run over those things we are going to play to-morrow night."

"Or take a walk with Mr. Strange," suggested Nixie. "That would be too exciting."

The two girls looked at each other, then they laughed.

"You are such a darling ostrich!" cried Nixie impulsively, "let's 'fess up, and tell how far we have gotten!"

"I haven't gotten anywhere," said Jane, indifferently, as she pinned on her hat.

"I have," announced Nixie, triumphantly. "I had to sacrifice dear old Dad to do it. You don't think he would mind being engaged to an actress just for a few minutes, do you?"

"Your father?" cried Jane, aghast.

Nixie nodded. "I had to make up a fib in order to get even with the dear Angus. I thought he was terribly foxy, Jane; but he isn't, he's easy. He took all I said in such

good faith that I felt unsportsmanlike. You know one does throw the little ones back."

"Isn't it rather a stretch to call Mr. Carmichael 'a little one'?" asked Jane; and remembering his titanic proportions they laughed again.

"Well he has to be educated," declared Nixie. "All men do. Why just before I left home an Englishman asked me if I wasn't afraid to come down South. He said he supposed there were still some red men at large. I told him there were lots of them, and that the alligators came up out of the swamps into the orange groves, and stood on their tails and bit the fruit right off the trees. And he swallowed it, my dear, orange groves, alligators and all!"

"So you are going to undertake to educate Mr. Carmichael?" asked Jane, looking down to hide the twinkle in her eyes.

"I am," declared Nixie stoutly, "and you are going to help me. You haven't done your part, Jane Kent, though heaven knows that little air of far off and chill unconcern

may be fruit of the deepest guile. We've got to pay him up for those two notes, and for frivoling as he has with both of us, and we have got to bring things to a crisis before to-morrow night, for the boys leave early the next morning."

A ring at the bell announced that Angus had arrived. Nixie flew to the window.

"There he is now! the beautiful wretch! Where did you say you were going?"

"Just driving," said Jane, as she slipped into her long fur coat and tripped down stairs.

Half an hour later when Heels dropped in, Nixie pounced upon him.

"They've escaped us!" she cried. "Gone off alone in a cart that could easily open out and seat four. But I know where they are going. It came to me the second they started. She was telling him last night about the new gym at the parish house. I'll wager my hat they've gone there. Can't we get there by car?"

Jane and Angus, after a brisk drive in the sparkling air leisurely turned the corner at

the parish house. As they did so, two familiar figures were mounting the steps, with even their backs giving every appearance of haste and glee.

Angus seized the reins from his companion, checked the horse so sharply that he brought it to its haunches, whirled the cart in its tracks, and succeeded in turning the corner undiscovered.

"Saved!" he ejaculated fervently, as they grazed the curbing and turned into a side street.

"Our devoted friends," laughed Jane. "Can't you see how surprised they were going to be when they found us? I can just hear Nixie saying, 'Why how did we happen to come to the same place?'"

"But what was Mrs. Kent doing there?" said Angus.

"Aunt Marcia?" asked Jane, surprised.

"Yes, I saw her at the window in a lavender dress. I'm sure of it."

"Why, of course you did! This is the afternoon Mr. Strange asked us all down to the

parish house reception. I forgot all about it. Shall we go back?"

"Not on your life," said Angus. "You are going to button your little coat up under your little chin, and if the wind isn't too much for you, we are going to drive to the end of things!"

"I told you once before that I liked the wind," said Jane, demurely.

It was a long drive and a cold one, and when they turned into the Kent driveway they realized that they had gone a long way in more ways than one. She had forgotten that she was playing a game, and that he, of course, was flirting. As a matter of fact, they had not flirted at all. They had fallen into a very earnest talk, about life work and ideals, and had confessed to each other their secret aims and aspirations.

It was with a new understanding that they reached home and entered the deserted house.

"We are the first to get back," said Jane. "Let's go over into the library."

The big wood fire had sunk to glowing embers and the room was cozy and warm and inviting.

Jane stooped on the hearth and before he could stop her threw on some fresh wood.

"I like to do it myself," she declared. "It makes the fire mine, you know!"

As she turned her head and looked up at him from her rich brown furs, her face was glowing, and her eyes tender.

The sense of solitude, and a delicious sense of confederacy in their truancy, quite filled the cup of bliss to its brim for Angus.

"Isn't this immense?" he said from the bottom of his heart, as he sank into a big chair and held out his hands to the blaze. "You know everything has been dead against me lately. In fact ever since I started down here to Kentucky. First my knee——"

"And then your wife."

"And then my rivals, Heels and His Chubbs."

"Now really, Mr. Carmichael — you mustn't imagine — I assure you —— !"

"Honestly it's been the very Nick to pay!" continued Angus.

"Are you sure it's Nick and not Nixie?" Jane couldn't refrain from asking.

"Oh, Miss Nixie!" Angus laughed. "She's a great girl. She's like a cannon fire cracker when its fuse is too short. You're never quite sure how or when she's going off, or where you will be when she does. But she couldn't have affected my luck. I'm under a hoodoo. You don't suppose you could take me under the protection of your star sapphire, do you?"

She was sitting on a low hassock before the fire, her hands clasped about her knees, and as he spoke she slipped the ring from her finger and held it out to him.

"Try it," she said.

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" cried Angus. "But do you mean it, honest? You'll let me wear it for a while?"

They had both exchanged favours often enough before this, and Jane had lost as many fraternity pins as Angus had

given away, but all that had held the thrill of merely general romance. This was different.

Angus turned the ring on his finger, but he was looking at her.

"I'll take the best care of it ever," he declared with unnecessary warmth. "Nothing in the world shall happen to it."

"Oh, it's not so valuable as that," Jane hastened to assure him. "Sometimes I don't have it on for months at a time."

"May I bring it back at Easter, if it brings me luck, you know?" he was leaning toward her now, his eyes so urgent, so honest, so beseeching, that the sudden success of the undertaking toward which she had not been working, swept Jane with panic.

She arose in alarm, her face paling and glowing like the pulsing fire.

"Didn't you hear the carriage?" she asked, nervously starting toward the door.

"Jane!" he implored, blocking her way, and catching both of her hands in his, "I've got to go back to college day after to-morrow.

"I've got to go back to college day after to-morrow. This may be the last minute we'll have alone together"

This may be the last minute we'll have alone together!"

"They *are* coming, I hear them," declared Jane dipping past him all aflutter.

She opened the front door a little breathless and with a fine colour.

"Why, where are your lights?" said Mrs. Kent, stepping in briskly and snapping on the electric switches.

"We have just arrived ourselves," said Angus, coming to the rescue. "We've had a bully drive."

"In this freezing wind?" said Mrs. Kent incredulously. "Did you forget, Jane, that you had an engagement at the parish house? Nixie and Mr. West didn't desert us."

"They never do," said Jane.

That night at bed time Nixie took Jane to task. None of the points of the afternoon had been lost upon her, the dim library, the unusual seriousness of Angus, and the preoccupation of Jane.

"Jane Kent, she threatened, brandishing her hair brush, "don't you *dare* believe what

he tells you! He's told it to a hundred girls before, and he's laughing at you this minute."

"No he isn't," said Jane firmly, "and beside I haven't said he had told me anything *to* believe. We've been horrid to him, Nixie, making his whole vacation a game of tangle-foot. I for one am just about ready to stop."

"Not till you've brought the thing to a finish," protested Nixie. "I'll wager I can convince you that I am right by noon to-morrow."

"How?"

"I'll tell you, if you'll promise to do what I ask."

"That depends —— "

"Oh! It isn't anything that involves your character, it's just a note I want you to write. If you won't do it, I shall know that you are taking this whole thing seriously, and that another little moth has singed its wings. Will you do it, if it's perfectly fair and square and simple?"

"Yes," said Jane miserably.

CHAPTER XII

Shows how too many opportunities came knocking at the door, impelling Mr. Carmichael to flight

AN outside observer would not have deemed it a bad beginning for the New Year had he beheld Angus Carmichael the next morning in his own room, comfortably ensconced with his leg upon a chair, canes at hand and a tray provided with steaming coffee, yellow cream, new-laid eggs and flaky rolls before him. Mrs. Binkins, like the rest of womankind, up to his recent acquaintance with a certain two, was doing her best to spoil him.

Yet a frown contracted his brow as he sipped his coffee perturbedly. The fact was, he was worried. In his left hand he held an opened note. On the tray was another. Either one arriving singly would have

brought pleasure, but coming together they brought consternation.

The one which he held in his hand, made his heart pound against his ribs. It was from Jane Kent and ran as follows:

DEAR MR. CARMICHAEL:

I had quite forgotten that there are all sorts of rules and conditions about wearing that star sapphire, if it is to bring you luck. Aunt Marcia tells me that certain zodiacal conjunctions of lucky stars and other astral conditions are all written down on a bit of parchment which she is going to look up for me this morning.

Of course I feel terribly responsible about that luck of yours, and want the charm to work. If you slip in here at four this afternoon I'll tell you all about it over a cup of tea. Nixie says she has an engagement at that hour, and it will be the only free hour I will have to-day.

Don't bother to answer this as we are starting out for the day and won't be back for luncheon.

JANE KENT.

Angus, still frowning, his breakfast cooling before him, took up the second note; it ran:

ANGUS DEAR:

You told me to call on you when I needed you, and I need you now *awfully*. In fact I've *got* to see you. I promise not to take any step until I talk it over with you, but I *must* see you this afternoon. Everything depends on whether you meant what you said the other day. Jane says she's got a date at four; that will be our only chance, as we are getting

ready now to go off for the day. You needn't answer, but come. Don't you dare fail me.

Yours (perhaps),
NIXIE.

To be sure it was nothing more than he deserved, for had he not held Miss Donovan's hand, and patted it reassuringly, even ardently, while he had adjured her to call upon him in any and all emergencies?

But those were the things the occasion demanded. It was not like Nixie to misunderstand. She was the kind of girl to have proposals to throw away, and the difficulty for the right man would be in bringing her to the point. He never dreamed she would be in earnest about it. Suppose she confided in Jane!

Four o'clock, and two girls would be waiting for him by special appointment, under the same roof! He must do something, go somewhere, and not get back in time; must break the other leg if necessary.

Pushing his breakfast tray aside, he limped to the window.

"Good morning, Gussie," said Billy West

from the doorway, "greeting the rosy dawn?"

Angus turned upon him a serious face. "I'm feeling rather seedy, Bill. The fact is if I don't get out for a long walk or drive or something I'm apt to be laid up. Three square meals a day of all this good Southern food, and no exercise, is telling on me."

Heels looked concerned. "What can I do for you old chap? You aren't up to a tramp, and the ground is too slippery to make driving any good."

"Get a motor," said Angus, recklessly. "You and Strange and I will go out for a good long spin. I want to get my lungs full of oxygen; I want to stay out a long while."

"It will be beastly cold," complained Heels, "but if I can find a steady, quiet chauffeur —— "

"Steady, quiet granny! I want the exercise. You get the machine and I'll run it. Hang it, don't you see that I must have something besides this confounded knee to think about?"

"There's Nixie," said Heels, thoughtfully.

"Or Jane," retorted Angus. "Either one of them can keep a fellow guessing. You go on and 'phone for a machine, and ask Strange to come along. Each of us will be happier where the other two are. Get a make that I know about. Strange says if there's one thing Louisville can furnish it's autos. Get a cracker-jack if you can."

But Heels was not listening; he was staring at a curious ring that encircled the little finger of Mr. Angus Carmichael.

"Hello! What's this?" he demanded.

Angus thrust his hand in his pocket.

"Lay overs for meddlers," he quoted. "You toddle along and get that machine."

"But honestly, don't you think it's too cold?" insisted Heels. "And besides this is our last day."

"It's six above, the paper says so. Ideal for autoing. The ground is solid and the snow dry. Besides the girls are gone somewhere for the day. Won't be back until four o'clock."

It was about noon when three well leathered, furred and goggled figures in an open machine sped eastward up Broadway. Angus would not have admitted it for worlds, but his teeth were chattering and his hands already numb.

"Where are we going?" asked Billy dolorously from the back seat.

"Oh Shelbyville, or anywhere. Strange, you know the roads, where shall we go for a good long spin?" asked Angus, cheerfully.

"Well I must be back by four," said the Rev. Luke, whose nose peeped like a pink icicle from between the brim of his cap, and the heavy lap robe.

"That will be easy," said Angus, "unless of course, something happens."

And it was not long after they had left the trolley line and the railroad and embarked upon that ancient turnpike, which forms part of Kentucky history, that things did begin to happen.

At Middletown Angus became suddenly solicitous of his tire, and made his friends descend and consume several minutes jump-

ing upon it to make sure it was not a little flat.

At Simpsonville he was sure he heard a thumping, which necessitated another delay and inspection.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong," said Mr. Strange, peering under the wheels with non-professional interest.

"You never can tell," said Angus, "we'll just stop at a garage in Shelbyville and make sure."

In spite of these delays they drew up before the country hotel in such excellent time that Angus's spirits drooped. At this rate they would reach home entirely too soon for his convenience.

"You are tired," said Mr. Strange, solicitously. "You oughtn't to have attempted such a long run. Suppose you and I go back on the train, and let Billy bring the machine back."

"Billy doesn't know a *spark-plug* from a *muffler!*" said Angus, triumphantly. "No, just let me rest here for half an hour, and get

a little something to eat, and I'll be ready to start again."

There was nothing to do but wait, and while Heels and Angus took a short nap, the Rev. Luke sat, watch in hand, making calculations.

When at last they were ready to start, Angus remembered the garage inspection. His delight at finding the oil supply short was tempered only by the fact that had it not been discovered he might have brought his machine to a halt in the middle of an oilless nowhere.

"I'm awfully particular about the oil I use," said Angus, going into tedious details as to quality. "So much depends upon the grade. Dirty stuff clogs things up. And a little care in the beginning saves time in the long run, you know."

"That depends on whose long run it is," said Mr. Strange, a little crossly. "I've let my train go, and I'll be late for that engagement. I hardly know where to reach — er — my party by 'phone, as they will not be home until four."

Angus smiled blandly into the machinery. If he was to become a culprit through his failure to keep an appointment, or rather two of them, how excellent a thing it would be to have a companion in disgrace! He was more than ever resolved that something should happen.

But the machine seemed pining to run. The ground frozen smooth and hard, with a thin layer of snow that packed like coarse salt, made a splendid surface. There was hardly a vehicle in the way. Once indeed they met an old-fashioned rockaway, and Angus blew all his horns so vociferously that the old white horse gave a mild caper.

As the vehicle halted three gaunt females descended in great trepidation.

"May we lead your horse by?" asked Angus, coming abreast and slowing up.

"Naw, but you might lead the women folks by," came a snappy masculine voice from the interior of the rockaway.

Full five lovely minutes had been consumed by this episode. Still, Shelbyville was only

an hour's run from Louisville for a good machine with a clear field on a fair road. It was now only a trifle past two, and they were well started. The case looked desperate.

Angus threw the ball of infant damnation to the back seat, got the Rev. Luke and Billy to disputing, followed it up by an allusion to apostolic succession, and played the grand coup.

"I never remember seeing that house on this road before," said Mr. Strange, observing his surroundings after fifteen minutes of disputatious oblivion. "Angus, are you quite sure we are on the main road?"

"Isn't it straight as a string? You said it was," said the shameless Angus.

"There is a fork somewhere along here," insisted Mr. Strange dubiously.

They passed some children trudging along, who sprang up the bank to put a wide distance between themselves and the monster.

"Never saw an auto, evidently," said Billy.

"Which proves that we are not on the

highway," said Mr. Strange, much disturbed. "Unless I am greatly mistaken our present road was an original creek-bed. Put me down, Carmichael, and I'll go up to that farm house and inquire."

He did so, and before Angus knew it, he was unwillingly guiding the machine by means of a short cut through a smooth lane, into the main road again near Middletown. Fifteen, perhaps twenty minutes had been lost, but there was still a dismaying gap between now and even three o'clock.

The machine ate up the road ravenously, and Angus gazing gloomily ahead could already see the two waiting figures in the Kent drawing-room. Suddenly his back straightened and his eyes brightened. Relief was in sight!

It was only a plank lying ahead of him, on one side of the road, but it was a nail-studded one, with the row of rusty teeth viciously upward. The machine swerved to that side of the road, there was a sharp report and a tire blew out.

"Just our luck!" the shameless Mr. Carmichael was heard to be saying. "With both my legs in commission I could mend it in ten minutes. But crippled as I am! It is good for thirty minutes and more. Billy, you ignoramus when it comes to autoing, help me down."

This young man was almost ashamed of the helpless way in which his friend had to be lifted out. Gus was usually more game. He insisted too, upon having the cushion put on the roadside for him, giving as an argument that owing to his patella he would mend the tire as best he might, *sitting down!* He took off his fur gloves leisurely too, and slipping Jane's ring off his finger put it carefully into his pocket, before he disposed of his gloves. Then he was ready.

Strange meanwhile had disappeared up the road, and now appeared out of a blacksmith's shop, followed by a man who bore — of all things — a new tire!

Angus groaned.

"What's the matter?" asked Heels with

impatient anxiety. "You hadn't any business coming on this fool trip."

"I'm all right," said Angus. "All this fresh air is doing me good."

An hour and twenty minutes remained to be consumed and Angus had but one more card to play.

Between Middletown and the burg of St. Matthews is a stretch of road so smooth and so level that it is a mere bait to temptation. Constable traps had been mentioned by Mr. Strange as they passed through the place at noon, and blue signs emphasized the law as they neared it again.

It was now that Mr. Strange, leaning forward, touched Mr. Carmichael on the shoulder. "Aren't we going a bit too fast?" he shouted.

They were. Their levers were set at top speed.

"I thought you were in a hurry to get home," Angus shouted back.

And then, as they sped toward the electric car station, it happened as he wished. Two

silver-badged men stepped out and held up their hands.

The car shot by them, slowed up, then began backing.

"Don't mind 'em," cried Billy, "they can get our number if they want and serve their warrants to-morrow."

Angus continued to back industriously. "If it was just us, Bill, but Mr. Strange, you know ——"

"Don't mind me," urged the Rev. Luke with unbelievable depravity, "just get away if you can; I'm late now."

"I don't like to," insisted Angus, "we can't deny we were going some sixty miles if it was ——"

"Taken with the worruds in your own mouth, young gintleman," interrupted one of the officers, coming alongside.

"Hello Murphy!" said Mr. Strange, "when did you get off the ball team to go at this? I suppose you could not take our cards and number, and let the matter come up later? We are in a great hurry."

Mr. Murphy thought that under the circumstances, he could, and once more the reverend little gentleman unconsciously scored.

"Your card West? Can you get at yours, Carmichael? If you ever need me, Murphy, in an affair of your own — what's the further trouble, Carmichael?"

For Angus having drawn his big gloves off, and after feeling hurriedly in his pockets, was pale.

"What is it, Gus?" asked Billy, "can't you find a card?"

"The ring," groaned Angus. "The ring, Jane — Miss Kent lent me — that I borrowed I mean — is gone. I must have pulled it out with my handkerchief at Middletown. We must go back."

His companions looked patiently tried.

"Let's look here first," suggested Mr. Strange, but the search was unsuccessful.

"We can't hope to find it this afternoon," said Heels. "You can go back to town and send some men out early in the morning."

"Billy West," said Angus solemnly, "I wouldn't go back to town without that ring for all the earth holds. If you don't want to go back to look for it, I'll go alone."

"In any case you will not need me," said Mr. Strange; and without waiting for a reply, he skipped nimbly off to catch the interurban car that was just starting for the city.

"I've got to find that ring," declared Angus, sincerely enough now. "And by George! if it isn't beginning to snow! The ground will be covered in no time. We'll make a run for it, anyhow."

Carefully the road was retraced, until the gathering dusk forced them to turn back.

"And we go in the morning!" said Angus miserably as they neared town. "I'll have to leave the search to other people. Bill if it hadn't been for this confounded mishap, the world would have been mine. I was winning in a walk!"

"Oh! I don't know," said Heels. "It strikes me there were others."

"Never!" cried Angus, "I have reason to

believe that she looks on you and Chubby as good friends only."

It was at this moment, just as they came in sight of the Strange house, that Billy West, loosening the rug tucked in about his person, felt something drop on his foot. As he stooped to pick it up he did not have to see it to know what it was.

So Angus had won in a walk, had he? Well he would make him run a bit.

"It is still a fair field, and no favours, isn't it? And all tactics go?"

"Of course," said Angus crossly. "I didn't say I'd won. Do get out, Bill, and telephone somebody to come get this confounded motor. We are due at the Kents's for dinner and we are late now."

And as the two made a rush for the house, Mr. William West dropped a sapphire ring into his vest pocket, and smiled heartlessly at the serious face of the limping giant whom he was tenderly helping up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

Tells of the last evening at the Kents's; relates three important conversations, and ends merrily with a midnight supper

NINE o'clock that evening found Mrs. Kent playing a comfortable game of solitaire in her library, while in the drawing room the natural uproariousness of youth was venting itself in college songs and nerve racking rag-time. The two visitors from next door had presented themselves in the midst of dinner, with proper apologies and many accounts of divers adventures. They had been reinforced later in the evening by other callers, and the interval between songs was filled with a perfect babel of talk and laughter.

It was in the midst of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" with its explosive chorus of "Whoop-a-doodle-doo!" that Angus Carmichael's voice

was heard asking if he might come in and sit with her a while.

Mrs. Kent looked up in the act of laying down a card. "Why, of course — come in and tell me the truth about what happened to-day. You miserable boys kept those poor girls dressed and waiting all afternoon, while Luke Strange got home when he said he would. You don't mind my going on, do you? When I begin Canfield I simply cannot stop till I make it. But don't you like to sing? I hope your knee is not paining you. You have been very reckless with it."

Angus disclaimed any suffering in that quarter, but his usually cheerful countenance betrayed a gloom so profound, as he took a chair beside the card table, that his hostess felt a genuine concern.

"I am afraid something is wrong. You haven't lost any more ——"

"Wives? No, worse than that," he responded with a melancholy smile.

Mrs. Kent laughed. "In that remark there seems to me to be a trifle of disrespect

towards that not impossible she who shall command your heart some day."

"Oh, I shall never marry," said Angus with intense seriousness. A very indifferent reception by both Jane and Nixie rendered him humble.

"No?" said Mrs. Kent. "Isn't it early to be making up your mind so positively?"

At this moment, the attractions of Mary and her lamb having been exhausted, Jane's clear soprano rose in a monotonous tune, accompanied by Billy's banjo, every word distinctly heard in the library:

> "I'm determined to be an old maid,
> I'd rather stay single and live in the shade
> So I'll not marry at all, at all
> So I'll not marry at all."

"A singular coincidence." Mrs. Kent observed, trying not to show all the amusement she felt. The chorus meanwhile took up the matter enthusiastically, reiterating:

> "For she's determined to be an old maid ——"

Angus leaned an elbow on the table and supported his chin in his hand. "That's

all nonsense, of course," he said gloomily, "but *I* mean it, and no joke. I have such beastly luck. I'm forever in some horrid scrape."

It would seem that he was about to confide, but if so, he thought better of it and abruptly changed the subject. "This is our last evening Mrs. Kent," he said. "We've had a perfectly corking time, and a lot of it is owing to you. Talk about Kentucky hospitality! Why we came down here, Billy and I, total strangers, and you took us in as if we had been old friends — you and Miss Jane."

"The pleasure has been ours, I assure you. Mr. Strange's friends always have the entrée here, but from now on we claim you as our own. I have enjoyed the fun almost as much as you. And to think we have to give Nixie up too! Mr. Donovan telegraphed her to-day not to fail to leave to-morrow. Jane will be simply lost."

After this the game went on in silence for a time; the music in the drawing room ceased,

and the callers were heard taking leave. Then presently, following some chords on the piano, Mr. Strange's voice was heard. He possessed a pleasing baritone, rather carefully cultivated, and sang with taste and feeling. Angus lifted his head. "I didn't know old Luke was such a canary," he said.

"O bid me love and I will give
A loving heart to thee—"

sang Mr. Strange.

"Oh yes, Luke does most things well," Mrs. Kent assented.

"And I have noticed that he usually gets what he goes after," said Angus. "Now to whom do you suppose he is presenting his heart in that off-hand fashion?"

Mrs. Kent smiled, gazing at her cards with a finger on her lips.

"Thou art my love, my life, my heart,
The very eyes of me.
And hast command of every part
To live and die for thee."

Thus ran the song. "So the question is," continued Angus, "What's he after? — I

say Mrs. Kent, I suppose he and Miss Jane are awfully good friends, aren't they?"

"Awfully!" Mrs. Kent repeated mockingly, then observing Mr. Carmichael's woeful countenance she was moved to add, for she liked this engaging young man exceedingly: "In fact, I think Jane regards Luke as a sort of — grandfather. But of course that is nothing to you," she added.

Angus laughed. "Well you see Mrs. Kent, I knew Luke was soft on somebody. It was this way: when we first got acquainted with him he made a lot of notes for Billy on some classical subject, and on the back of one of the sheets was a love sonnet — real tip top poetry, Shakespearian and all that—in the rough, interlined and erased, you know. It was all about flowers and stars. Perhaps I oughtn't to tell it, but I'll bet he's confided in you. He thinks the world and all of your judgment. Is she good enough for old Luke? Do you know her?"

"Oh slightly," said Mrs. Kent sweeping

up the cards and beginning to shuffle them. "I think she'll make him happy, but I must not betray a confidence."

"That's all right," said Angus whose spirits had suddenly risen, "I'll keep it dark." To himself he was saying that with Luke Strange out of the field, and Billy West safely anchored at College, he could easily duplicate that lost ring, and with it make a straight dash for the goal.

At this very moment, in the cushiony corner beneath the sheltering curve of the staircase, quite unmoved by the tender sentiment of Luke's song, those birds of a feather, Nixie Donovan and Billy West, were putting two and two together with results destined to be far reaching.

"Why is Mr. Carmichael rushing Mrs. Kent to such a degree, will you please inform me?" Nixie extended a slender red-slippered foot, and crossing her knees, set in motion a succession of gauzy black frills as she leaned forward, on her folded arms, and looked Mr. West in the eyes. "What's up?" she de-

manded. "What causes that anxious expression on his youthful countenance?"

Billy returned the gaze admiringly. Say, what you would, Nixie was first-rate fun. "Oh I suppose he's sorry to be leaving so soon."

"It is no such simple sorrow as that. Maybe he's sorry he isn't leaving sooner. But honest, now, was that a genuine accident this afternoon?"

"If you had heard the tire explode you'd have thought so, but why do you ask?"

"Oh never mind, I was just wondering."

Mr. West was silent for a moment with the air of one who looks before he leaps, then he said: "Cross your heart and swear you'll never tell if I show you something?"

Nixie nodded, never removing her eyes from his face, keeping the frills in motion with an impatient foot.

With all the deliberation imaginable, Billy produced from an inner pocket the star sapphire. "That's the row," he said briefly.

Nixie sat up, her eyes flashing. "Where

did you get it?" she demanded. "Did Jane ——"

"Oh never you mind where I got it; I've got it all right — that is the point."

Clasping her hands behind her head, Nixie lay back on the cushions, the frills fluttered scornfully. "You don't fool me, my friend," she said, giving a special emphasis to each word. "You didn't get it from Jane — not on your birthday!"

"Well who said I did?" asked Billy, and then, for he was dying to share his villainy, he added, "I found it. Gus had it — dropped it out in the auto when the tire blew up. I found it. Don't you see?"

"See? — rather! And that's what's the matter with him?"

"Yes, he feels pretty sore, but mum's the word. Gus has always had things too much his own way. A little adversity is good for him."

"I see, and he feels so bad he might just as well feel worse!" Nixie nodded, and bringing her mischievous face very close to Billy's

she said, coaxingly, "I'll tell you what, you let me have that ring just for to-night. I'll give it back in the morning."

"He hesitated. You won't spoil the fun?"

"Me! spoil the fun?" With tilted chin and oblique glance through drooping lids, she added, "Nixie!"

"You don't think he has said anything — 'fessed up, so to speak?" asked Nixie, after the ring had changed hands.

"You bet he hasn't. He hasn't had a chance. What's more he is anxious not to have one. Gus is fencing for time as sure as you live. At least that is the way it looks to me."

"Ah!" Nixie said, turning the ring so that only an innocent gold band was visible. "Then he shall have a chance. You and I must see to it. He must tell her he's lost it, and then ——" she waved the hand that wore the ring. "Don't you see?"

Billy surrendered himself to her leadership, and Nixie swiftly outlined a plan of procedure the details of which are immaterial except

that the plotters presently separated, Mr. West entering the drawing room and Nixie strolling toward the library.

The sounds of laughter and argument were shortly heard in the drawing room, and then Mr. Strange, most innocent of conspirators, passed through the hall and summoned Mrs. Kent. "You are wanted to settle a momentous question, please," he said, and led her away.

Before Angus quite knew how it happened, before he could take his elbows from the table, he was confronted on the other side of it by an accusing angel. Drawn to her full height, the whiteness of her shoulders emphasized by the gauzy blackness of her frock, with those daring touches of red, her lips curling, her eyes sparkling, stood Miss Donovan.

"Just a moment please, Mr. Carmichael. I must ask for some explanation of your very singular behaviour. Your avoidance of me is so marked ——"

Almost paralyzed with surprised embarrassment, Angus had got to his feet, "I am — I

thought — surely you must understand —— " he stammered.

"Certainly I understand *now*, Mr. Carmichael. I may be stupid at times, but I wake up eventually. I'm young but I'm learning. One experience of being made a cat's paw is quite enough, thank you."

"Gracious Heavens, Miss Nixie! I haven't the least idea what you mean." Poor Angus put his hand to his bewildered brow.

As Nixie had no idea herself what she meant but was making it up as she went along, she declined to elucidate. She twisted her bracelet and looked down, not unmindful of the effect of curling lashes against a velvet cheek. "Pray don't attempt to explain, Mr. Carmichael" (as if he had made any attempt — or as if she had not insisted upon it a moment before), "it is useless. No, not a word, I simply cannot listen." She paused and then looked with startled eyes over her shoulder at Jane. Billy had played up to her in a masterly way.

Angus also stared at Jane vacantly.

"I beg your pardon," Mr. West said.

"But I fear I am *de trop*," Jane began.

"Indeed you are not, my dearest child," cried Nixie. "You simply relieve an awkward situation. Angus — Mr. Carmichael, has something to tell you. He was just saying he had not been able to get a word with you all evening. So now I'll give him a chance." And dropping a kiss on Jane's cheek this arch conspirator fled.

But it is often the fate of the wicked to over-reach themselves. Upon both Jane and Angus those vanishing shoulders left an impression of impish glee, which was further confirmed by a sound of stifled merriment from the hall where the plotters had presumably met.

Jane and Angus looked at each other and suddenly the game took a new turn. It was the two of them now against Nixie and Billy. Jane's vague, uncomfortable suspicions fell away before the candour of Mr. Carmichael's entreating eyes.

"Please, Miss Jane, don't go" — for she

had rather the look of a bird poised for flight, — "I don't know what Miss Donovan meant by what she was saying to me, nor what she and Billy West are up to, but it is true I do want to talk with you the worst in the world, though I have a dreadful confession to make."

Jane, who had all day been feeling remorsefully conscious for her connivance in Nixie's heartless scheme, told herself anew that she hated practical jokes, they weren't fair; and Nixie was so abominably clever! "A confession!" she echoed, wondering if it had to do with that broken engagement.

Her sympathies were enlisted for Angus before he had spoken a word. There was something irresistible in the elaborate care with which he was arranging the cushions in one corner of the davenport for her, and she accepted graciously the downy nook and the foot stool, and waited while he pushed forward a high-backed chair for himself, directly in front of her.

Sincere concern was written on Angus's face, besides he was a little white and worn,

for it will be remembered he had risen from a couch of real suffering to take his part in the round of unintermittent gaieties of the past week. It pleaded for him as, with that boyish and engaging frankness which was his greatest charm, he told her of the loss of the ring.

"When or *how* it happened I can't tell. I only know that when I suddenly thought of it, it was gone. I shall find it again. I know I shall. I have advertised, and I will have the pawnshops watched. Oh I shall find it."

"If that is all, you need not mind in the least," answered Jane cordially. "Why if it never turns up I will not care. Indeed I mean it. It was just a curio. I only wore it for fun."

"It is heavenly good of you to say so, but you shall have it back," Angus insisted recklessly. "For you see, even if you are honest in saying you don't care for the ring — I mean — of course you are — but — well what I want to say is that anyhow *I* care. You see it meant everything to me, because

it belonged to you — you had worn it. Why if it had been pure brass it would have been the same to me."

"Or one of those rheumatic rings that Mrs. Binkins wears?" suggested Jane.

"Please now, don't make fun. I feel awfully serious to-night. It's my last chance for goodness knows how long. Couldn't you say just one reassuring word to me?"

"What do you want me to say," asked Jane with a bewitching half smile. Then alarmed at her own temerity she extended her hand upon which shone several handsome rings and added just for something to say, "You see I'd never miss it."

That Mr. Carmichael was equal to the occasion is sufficient. When Jane recovered her hand her cheeks rivalled the crimson of the cushions. But she was laughing and had not succeeded, evidently, in refuting Angus's contention that two more rings were needed.

When in the opinion of Nixie and Billy this interview had lasted long enough, and

they invaded the library, the davenport and the high backed chair were untenanted.

"They have eloped," said Billy.

But a search of the premises eventually revealed them sitting side by side on the table in the butler's pantry, an open cake box between them.

"You haven't eaten all that lovely cake?" cried Nixie. "Mrs. Kent promised me a big slice for my lunch to-morrow."

"Why didn't you come when we called you?" asked Angus, serenely contemplating the large and nutty slice he held.

"Oh yes," said Billy, "it's your inning now, but wait."

"They can't have eaten it all," said Mrs. Kent, entering the swinging door, followed by Mr. Strange. "But why not have something more substantial? Here is the chafing dish Mr. West; we all know what an adept you are. Come let's see what Jeremiah has left in the store room."

And so their last evening in Kentucky ended merrily with an informal midnight supper.

CHAPTER XIV

Tells of Mrs. Binkins's efforts to speed the parting guests, and of the cloud no larger than a girl's hand, that rises upon our hero's horizon

"THEY won't make it, they ain't even dressed yet, and the expressman a swearin' round in the entry this half hour past," complained Mrs. Binkins to Mr. Strange as she panted up the steps with an overcoat and umbrella and two caps in her hands.

"Give the traps to me," said the Rev. Luke as, watch in hand, he stepped cautiously over a dressing-case in the doorway and surveyed the chaotic bedroom of his two guests.

"Look here, do you two fellows intend to make that 7.30 train or have you decided to stay over?"

"Luke here, Luke there, Luke everywhere!"

Angus warbled in a thrilling crescendo from his perch on the dresser.

"Don't mind him," Billy cut in, "he's singing Christmas carols because he's got his own rags stowed away. What *I* want, my dear sir, is not advice, but assistance."

"Very well," said Mr. Strange, drawing something from behind the door. "Here's a box Angus, which I imagine should have gone at the bottom somewhere."

"Oh, Glory!" groaned Billy. "That's mine. Say, would you mind standing on this suit case while I lock it? I am going to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."

"You should acquire the art of packing from me, my son," said Angus, cheerfully surveying his own strapped boxes. "I make a specialty of suit cases."

"Huh," snorted Billy, "you packed all the smooth things and dumped all the knotty, lumpy ones over here on me. That's why the blooming thing won't close."

He seized the suit case by its calfskin back

and showered forth a miscellaneous collection of wearing apparel.

"Dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Binkins despairingly from the doorway. "That's the third time Mr. West has dumped out that there valise, and the expressman says he ain't going to wait another minute!"

"Billy," said the Rev. Mr. Strange, and he spoke as one with authority, "hand me that box, now the other one, now those shirts." And almost before one could realize it, the suit cases were travelling through the hall on the shoulders of the expressman.

"Sorry I'm not going back with you," said Mr. Strange to his guests. "I'll be detained here a day or two longer."

"Don't die of the blues without us," cautioned Angus. "Allow me to present you with a souvenir of my enduring regard." He waved a hand at his cane standing in the corner. "I relinquish all right, title and interest therein."

"What's this?" asked Billy drawing forth from the dresser a remarkable tie upon whose

background of brilliant blue, large white polka dots disported themselves.

Angus glanced furtively toward the door.

"Hush! The old lady gave it to me. I admired her scarf, said I adored spots, and this was the result!"

"Philandering as usual," said Billy. "What are you going to do with it?"

"Give it to Luke," said Angus. "You'll get rid of it somehow, won't you? Only don't let her see it. I wouldn't hurt her feelings for a farm."

"Whose farm?" asked Billy, struggling into his coat.

Mr. Strange, always considerate, wrapped the tie in a bit of paper and laid it on the hall table.

"Me Lord, the carriage waits," announced Billy from the window, and five minutes later the whole party, including the girls from next door, were on their way to the Union Station.

"They were right sweet young gentlemen," commented Mrs. Binkins, a little later, "but

mighty disorderly. Binkins himself couldn't beat 'em. It'll be like cleaning up after a cyclone."

She sighed as she mounted the stairs and prepared to ascertain the exact extent of the damage. The first thing that caught her eye was Mr. Carmichael's cane. "Poor young man! He has forgotten it!" With nervous fingers Mrs. Binkins hastily pinned on her new velvet hat, a "Merry Widow," of generous proportions, laden with a purple harvest of plumes. Mike Fahey and Mr. Carmichael were jointly responsible for this headpiece, the one having aroused a renewed interest in fashionable attire, the other having furnished the means wherewith to gratify it.

The Merry Widow and Mrs. Binkins rushed excitedly down the stairs. On the hall table was discovered a small parcel also overlooked by the departing guests.

Parcel and cane in hand, Mrs. Binkins dashed into the street, only to see her car disappearing around the corner.

Across the street an old negro stood

in livery beside the open door of a touring car.

Mrs. Binkins did not hesitate. "Jim Johnson," she said descending upon him, "you've got to take me down to the Union Station. Mr. Meeks won't be ready for half an hour, the cook has just been over home to borrow some eggs for his breakfast. Hurry up quick! it won't take you but a little while."

With Jim the command of a white lady, any white lady, meant unquestioning obedience. It was but a few minutes before he brought his car to a stand at the Union Station, and Mrs. Binkins with her hat awry and her hair flying, scrambled out and dashed for the platform.

In the meanwhile the five young people had had time to disintegrate into three divisions, two conspirators, two victims, and one mediator in the person of the Rev. Luke Strange.

The irrepressible gaiety of Angus, due to his propitious interview with Jane on the previous evening, called for some action on

the part of Billy, while Nixie, by nature a conspirator, needed no special incentive. Moreover, Mr. Carmichael and Jane were openly demonstrating the fact that two and three do not always make five, and in those cases where two and three make Two — and three more — the lesser three, the afterthought conceded to mathematics, are apt to resent the capitalization.

"Gus is altogether too set up about something," whispered Heels to Nixie. "It's disgraceful to speed the parting host with such a joyful countenance. When are you going to get busy with that ring and make him realize that life is not all ice cream and wedding cake?"

"Don't you worry," said Nixie. "I am saving it for the final curtain."

Angus and Jane were too preoccupied to mark the import of this whispered conference, and it was not until Nixie Donovan called out to Angus, that they were even aware of their presence.

"You'll get me a copy of 'Life' won't

you, Mr. Carmichael? Mr. West has gone to look after the baggage. I hate men who always have to look after things. No, that's the December number, I want the new one. Let's go over to the news stand."

While the search was being made, Heels captured Jane and under pretense of not being able to find Miss Donovan's trunk, managed to keep her several minutes in the baggage room.

"It's time to get aboard," called Luke Strange, briskly. "Billy, you bring Miss Donovan's grip, I'll call her."

But after he had found her, and succeeded in getting her and Heels aboard, he discovered that Angus was missing.

That young gentleman had recaptured Jane Kent, and was valiantly trying to redeem the time lost. They stood close together before the closed iron gate that led to the platform, presenting to observers from the rear, an appearance of absorbed interest in the trackway that stretched before them on the other side of the grating.

"Easter! Lord, that's a long time off!" Angus was saying, with eyes so eloquent that Jane was afraid to trust hers to an encounter. "And I'll bring a star sapphire like yours, if I have to go to India for it!"

"Don't bother about the ring, please!" Jane's eyes as she lifted them reflected the light in his. "And as to your coming down at Easter — well — that depends."

"Depends? It must not depend! — Jane — dearest — why should it depend?"

"I only mean that it depends — on you!"

Angus seized her small brown-gloved hand as a slow warning clang took precedence of all other noises. Together they ran past the row of iron gateways and through Number Six.

Nixie's plumed head, and Billy's cropped one leaned from a window in the furthest coach, below which stood Mr. Strange.

Angus scrambled to the platform of the nearest car.

"Good-bye — Jane." Angus held her eyes at last.

"Good-bye — Angus."

At that moment there was a commotion at gate Number Six. Mrs. Binkins, clutching a cane and waving a spotted necktie, pursued by a loping guard, sprinted down the platform, with a speed as unexpected as that of a dark horse who wins the Derby.

With a mighty effort she reached Angus in time to pass his possessions through the open window, whereupon her duty done, she turned her attention to her disordered toilet.

Jane Kent, shaken with laughter, turned to say good-bye to Nixie and Heels who leaned from the window of the coach that was now moving past her.

"Auf wiedersehn," she said, smiling up at them, and then her smile suddenly faded. On the plump white hand which Nixie Donovan roguishly extended to her, blazed her own star sapphire!

Angus Carmichael, far ahead, waved energetically, but his only response was from Luke Strange. There was something about a certain slender, girlish, tailor-made back,

which, even from that distance, gave him the uneasy impression of having turned suddenly rigid, indifferent, uncompromising. Angus did not suspect it, but a cloud not larger than a girl's hand had risen above his horizon.

CHAPTER XV

Showing how Angus Carmichael languished through the spring term, and how Billy West resorted to stratagem in the hope of arousing his dormant ambition

"Mr. Angus Carmichael,
If time hangs on your hand,
Is there no math. for you to work,
Nor any Greek to understand?

"Go train your mind to calculus,
Go train your soul to Grecian woe;
Pray heaven that you may not flunk,
And let the lovely lady go."

"THAT," said Mr. William West to Mr. Angus Carmichael, several weeks later, as they sat in their little sitting room at college, "is my own composition. I wrote it myself, and I think it is rather tidy."

"I don't think much of it," said Angus. "I have a cousin that can write all 'round that. She sent an elegy on Byron to Scrib-

bler's magazine, and they sent it back, saying, 'This poem has very nice sentiment. Thank you.' Cousin Sue has written six novels——"

"It were my father that were hung," murmured Billy reminiscently.

"How does that come in?" demanded Angus.

Heels sighed. "The literary allusion, my good man, is something that ought not to be explained. If you didn't scorn to read a book occasionally you wouldn't be so rusty."

"Books be hanged!" said Angus as he got up crossly, banged the door and went tramping down the corridor.

"He'll flunk," said Billy with conviction, blowing rings of smoke into the air. "He'll moon around, and go off walking by himself from now till midnight, cut Greek, and get farther behind than ever."

It was late in the month of January, and college, to Carmichael's thinking, if one judged from his actions, was not only stale and flat but exceedingly and heavily unprofitable. For what good was it to be grinding away at

Greek tragedy, (taken only to please one's parents) to find that all the classic letters spelt J-A-N-E?

Or of what value was it to stare for full two hours at a problem in celestial mechanics and to conclude one's study with the following query: Given, on the part of Jane, a certain amount of professed interest in one Angus Carmichael up to the moment of parting at the Louisville Union Station. Why then should Jane's answers to Angus's outpourings upon letter paper consist of one chilly little note, and what should the said Carmichael read between the lines of this turn-down?

To these questions, so far, there was no least suggestion of an answer, from the Fates, from Carmichael himself, or even from the cheerful and practical Billy West.

Yet it was Billy West who, all unconsciously, was responsible for this state of affairs.

When he found himself back at Yale with that star sapphire in his possession, he discovered that the affair had assumed entirely too serious a turn for Angus to regard it as

a joke, and that, after all, the explanation and the return of the ring would best come from Nixie Donovan to Jane Kent. He therefore sent a letter to this effect, with the ring in a registered box, urging Nixie to return it at once to Jane with their joint confession and apologies, thus clearing Angus completely without involving him in the matter.

But it chanced that this time the father of Miss Donovan became an actual, not a mythical factor, in her affairs. The letter bearing the New Haven post mark reached Summit on the 6th day of January, that being the same day when Miss Donovan herself, bird of passage that she was, sailed for Bermuda with an ailing and ancient relative. It took but a moment for her father, reviewing her mail on the hall table that evening, to draw a line through "Summit" and substitute "Bermuda." Nor was it with any espionage upon his child that the postmark and the handwriting chanced to leave an impress on his mind. Hitherto he had asked for but one thing at Nixie's hands—his only demand

was perfect confidence between herself and him.

But when the next day's mail brought a tiny registered box for Nixie, bearing this same writing and mark, for which package he had to sign, he quietly broke the seal and cut the string. Then with equal quiet, he put the ring away in his private box — and sat down and wrote to Nixie.

In the meanwhile it was coming on to February at Yale, and, in February at Yale, if Euripides continues to spell J-A-N-E it means a failure in a major subject.

To this fact, as continually pointed out by his room-mate, Carmichael was languidly indifferent. His chief concern, since the notable Christmas pilgrimage to Kentucky, was with the fact that Jane's only note was chill and brief — so chill and so brief that if he endeavoured to read between the lines he read as follows: "No, I do not care for you at all. I am sorry, but I never have, and of course I never shall. No, it's quite impossible. I'm sorry, but indeed I can't

think of it." What he wished to read, on the contrary, was written in the colours of hope — oh, azure and April-green and rose! — and though it said "I care," it said it most exquisitely and in lines for no other eyes than his own.

This note, and the only other missive he had ever had from her, he kept by themselves in the only drawer of his desk that boasted an unlost key. From time to time he took them out and read them, then read them again. He touched them as he might have touched flowers, with fingers both caressing and reverent.

All this, however, was when Billy West was out of the way. It was merely by his friend's settled melancholy and occasional cynical comments on life in general that that young gentleman was able to tell how the wind was blowing.

"My theory," said Angus one evening — and he said it with an air of fine indifference, and with puffs of an ostentatious pipe — "my theory, Heels, is that a young man on the

horizon of a young woman's existence is not so large a speck as he thinks he is."

"As for instance?" said Billy.

"There is no instance necessary (puff), unless indeed a person be a rank materialist (puff), such as the gentleman from Boston, (puff, puff), and he can supply his own instances."

"Well, of course," said Billy, "there are specks and specks, but when a girl *writes* cordially and genially to a speck ——" He paused; then he went on. He was solicitous for Angus, but the star of Billy's nativity was a star that presaged mirth.

"When such a girl writes," he repeated, "writes to a man — er — well, rather often —the man don't feel so speckish as he might."

Angus turned his sofa pillow and punched it. He had no feeling against it, but it was necessary at that moment to punch something and punch it thoroughly. So Jane was writing to Billy! Or, perhaps she was writing to Luke Strange! He turned the pillow again, adjusted it badly, and rose, as if weary

alike of pillow and discussions. He disdained however, to be ungenerous. If she wrote, if they wrote — Jane or Billy or Luke Strange or all three together — why, then, they wrote. Only — only — it was not for such as Jane to be fickle. Other people (Nixie, for example), might turn and twist and lead one a dance to the moon. But Jane ——

"You didn't hear me, did you?" asked Heels at this point. "I said that to-day was Friday and to-morrow would be Saturday."

"A profound observation," said Mr. Strange, who was spending an hour of the evening with them, enshrined in their best arm-chair. He was there, in fact, by appointment, and at the request and arrangement of Mr. West. It was his part, duly defined, to warmly and stoutly second, aid, and abet, any proposition put forth on this occasion by the said Mr. West, for the welfare of their young friend, Mr. Carmichael.

"And talking of to-morrow being Saturday," said Mr. West, "and apropos of specks on the horizon of young ladies: Mr. Strange, are

you aware that you and Gus and I are going up to Wellesley to-morrow, for the afternoon? We are going by way of an innocent diversion."

"Don't mind him," said Angus, "he merely thinks he said it. He's very mild, and he really has lucid moments, Mr. Strange."

"We are going," said Billy, imperturbably, to visit three beautiful young ladies —Alicia, Amanthus, and Almira."

"'Call me Daphne, call me Chloris,'" murmured the visitor. "Are they—are these young ladies typical of their institution?"

"Typical of the college output? Not on your life! I mean — ah — certainly, quite typical."

It was, perhaps, by intuition that the Reverend Luke Strange could so enter into the shortcomings of Carmichael with regard to Greek tragedy and the allied subjects. Or, being an older man, it may have been by reason of former personal and vivid experiences of his own, similar in nature and in results.

He seemed also ably to divine the purpose of Billy West and to grasp the full significance of Alicia, Amanthus, and Almira. Just what the scheme was to be, he did not know, but that it had to do with awakening the dormant ambition of a lovesick swain, and tiding him over the coming examinations, he felt confident.

At all events, Mr. Strange smiled blandly and accepted the invitation promptly. He would do his part—there was no doubt as to that—as ably as, on recent by-gone occasions, he had circumvented two youths *en route*, mastered the intricacies of the barn dance in five minutes, and kept an engagement under serious difficulties.

CHAPTER XVI

Tells how three young ladies, products of culture, education and the higher life, bring Mr. Carmichael to a realization of his awful deficiencies in these branches and send him back aroused to the nearness of exams

"IT is all so intensely beautiful," said Alicia to Angus, "that I feel I can hardly bear it. My spirit is actually weighted down with it!"

They were skirting the shore of Lake Waban, on foot, on their way to Tupelo Point — that is, Angus was skirting it with the escort of the blue-eyed Alicia; for Luke Strange was snugly indoors, drinking tea in the care of Amanthus and Almira; while Billy, perfidious ever, had betaken himself to a certain unscheduled "Emily" to whom, it might seem now, his visit was especially directed.

Now Alicia was a child of the morning; there were certain minor poets who had even gone so far as to say as much in rhyme; and it was not strange, therefore, that Angus, on meeting the three young women, had promptly allied himself with the versifier. It was the sunlight, caught in her curls; it was the dawn, arising in her cheeks; it was sun and dawn and the blue morning-glory, meeting in her eyes; or, perhaps, it was some older enchantment, which is quite independent of morning and afternoon and night. The choice once made, however, Mr. Carmichael found himself quite occupied; for Alicia, after allowing him a small cup of tea, invited him to Tupelo Point, the walk to be made along the lake, where the snow was freshly fallen, and, so he calculated, not less than twenty-four inches deep. The snow, however, was a mere bagatelle; it was the intensity of the lady with which he had breathlessly to contend.

"That last faint flush on the lake!" said Alicia, rapturously. "It's rose; and then

it's carmine; and then it's garnet. And the dark, dark lines of those beautiful Italian gardens! Such delicate austerity! It's Italy — transplanted to New England! Don't you think so?"

"Transplanted?" said the practical Angus. "Why, you don't suppose they brought them over? Oh yes — yes — of course, I see what you mean. It's great, Miss Halliday. Only, what I don't know about forestry — well!"

"They fill me with longing," said Alicia. "They make me think of Shelley — and Keats — and 'Adonais'! Don't they you?"

"Why — why yes, I reckon they do," said Angus, courageously. "That is — when I look at them long enough. To tell you the truth, Miss Halliday, I —— "

"And Shelley, especially," pursued Alicia, with plaintive joy. "You remember those lines about himself in 'Adonais'?"

"I'm afraid I don't," he murmured apologetically. " I—I'm not much at lit., you know. I'd rather do things in lab. any day in the week."

But Alicia was quite undisturbed. She stopped in two feet of drift and looked far out across the lake and into the darkness of the gardens.

"The lines go this way," she said. "I'll say them to you. You'll remember them ——"

"A-licia! Aw, Alicia!" came a voice from afar. "They are calling us to come back."

The voice was that of Miss Emily MacNarrow, who when not attending college, was usually engaged in riding a bronco on a ranch in Arizona.

It was not a mellifluous voice, but to one young gentleman, at that moment, it was as the cry of a rescue party in the Arctic.

Returned within doors, to the first-floor-centre, Angus Carmichael made his next progression, being transferred to Amanthus, while Alicia assisted Almira in the care of Luke Strange. Now Amanthus was dark in her beauty, and if Alicia was poetic, Amanthus was artistic.

"Yes," Amanthus was saying fervidly, "I have always cherished this Vedder. It's the Sibyl, you know — the terrible, inscrut-

able, determined Cumæan Sibyl! And it's such an absolute contrast to the Sistine! Of course, I adore Angelo's, but this is so very interesting because it's realistic. However, I'm afraid it's very Vedderesque!"

"Is it?" said Angus, feebly. "I don't know myself. I like her, though," — with more heart — "she knows what she's about."

"Y-yes, I believe she does," admitted Amanthus. "By Vedderesque, I suppose I meant the style. Perhaps she is more a Sibyl. Now with Michel Angelo — You know the Erythrean? Do you think the Erythrean is really Sibylline?"

She shaded her eyes to gaze up at the picture, and Angus looked over at Luke Strange with a glance that said plainly and imploringly, "In distress. Send help at once."

"I'm awfully sorry," he confessed. "But the fact is — I don't think I've seen her. Or if I have, I've forgotten her. You know, don't you, Mr. Strange?"

And then did Angus progress again, being at once transferred to Almira, a nut-brown

young woman, whose particular joy, it appeared, was the study of sociology. Almira made more tea; she made it vigorously; and, over their second cups, she dilated on the subjects of social settlements, group fortunes, and union labor, with a light excursion into the field of woman suffrage.

"Do you think," she was saying at the end of ten minutes, "that the basis for a definition of socialism must be entirely economic? That it must be given in terms of the ownership of the means of production?"

"Well, I am afraid I am not prepared to say," gasped Angus.

"You are quite right not to give an off-hand answer. There are as many cheap opinions about that as there are about Henry George's theory of the Single Tax. I hope you are interested in the question of suffrage for women?"

"Oh yes — yes," said Angus, snatching at the chance to wade into shallower water. "They ought to have it if they want it!"

"As long," said Almira, severely, "as certain women sit on the fence and shout for

one side and then shout for the other side, so long will progress be retarded. For my part, I'd make them get down! One way or the other way, but some way."

"I'm — I'm sure you would," murmured Angus miserably. "That is — of course — I think you ought."

"And if they didn't," said Almira ——

"Didn't what, Miss Pollard?" asked Billy, coming into it cheerfully. "Didn't vote for Roosevelt, or didn't go over to Tammany? Angus, it's time to catch our train. Are you coming, or will you stay and be a suffragette?"

Carmichael rose with alacrity. He failed to note, as he did so, that Billy looked grinning inquiries at Miss Pollard, and Miss Pollard looked roguish reassurances at Billy. He failed, also, to intercept glances between Alicia of 'Adonais' and Amanthus of the Erythrean Sibyl — glances in which wicked laughter had its undeniable part. Nor did he know that at the last moment Miss Emily MacNarrow of Arizona took occasion to tell Mr. West that he and his confederates, Alicia,

Amanthus, and Almira, ought to be ashamed of themselves.

"And what Almira, for one, didn't have to cram to be able to do it!" said Miss MacNarrow, accusingly.

But Angus knew none of all this. He merely said good-bye and went off to the station in a little carriage driven by a man called Tommy.

That night, however, he shut himself up in his room and read Jane's chill little note once more. Then he came forth into the common sitting room, and took up a text book, with a certain grip of the hand and a certain set of the head which Billy knew of old and hailed with a sigh of relief.

"It worked," he said to the Rev. Mr. Strange. "It worked like a mustard plaster."

"I should say," said Mr. Strange, "that a bouquet of some sort, or boxes of candy—or something—should be sent to the young ladies."

"Alicia?" said Billy, "And Amanthus? And Almira? Why those little wretches had the time of their lives!"

CHAPTER XVII

Which coming a bit too soon to be an epilogue, shall be the posy of a ring

"FOR a man on the crew," said Billy to Angus, "it strikes me you are not looking fit."

It was Easter now and the jaws of the lions had been passed without catastrophe by Angus, even of that lion yclept Greek tragedy. Still, Carmichael had lost both weight and colour, which facts were by no means lost upon Billy.

"Your costume," said Angus, in return for this kindness, "is wholly inappropriate to your nature. You ought to wear petticoats and a frilled cap and make gruel for me."

"It's no use," thought Billy at this point; "I can't do anything with him. I've got to have help. I've got to write to Jane Kent."

The result was a carefully composed epistle.

He described a young gentleman sought after by many boon companions, and refusing all invitations save those of the writer himself, who was thereby flattered but alarmed. He depicted an heroic struggle with Greek, and a conquest of the same, followed by a spring term of listlessness and stoical indifference. He told of the anguished efforts of the boat crew to arouse some interest in the breast of their star member, and he ended by an appeal for assistance. Would she help him? Could she? Was there any counsel she could offer? And if not, would she forgive him for bothering? "You see," he wrote in conclusion, "it's up to me to do something, and this is the only thing I can think of that might do any good."

The letter was posted on Monday; on Friday the answer came, and Billy opened it fearfully.

Yes, Mr. West had been quite right to speak to her — that is, to write to her— if he felt that she might be of the slightest service either to him or Mr. Carmichael.

She regretted that all was not well with Mr. Carmichael and hoped that he would soon recover his spirits. So far as she was personally concerned, however, there was nothing she could do or suggest, except, indeed, that Mr. Carmichael explain his statement concerning the loss of a ring of hers which she now knew to be in the possession of a mutual friend. At the close of the letter she was very cordially his, and believed it right on his part to think of everything that might concern the welfare of his friend.

To this close, however, Billy did not read. When he arrived at the passage of the ring — which he subsequently described as if it had been a passage through the Alps — Billy West rose to his feet and whistled.

Then for the second time he sat down and wrote, but this time wrote madly, frantically, and not to Jane, but to that elusive and tricksy sprite, Miss Nixie Donovan.

This letter he addressed as he had addressed the ring and former letters to Summit, in her father's care. He also sent a note to

the pater himself, asking if he knew anything of a small registered package that had been sent to Miss Donovan over two months before.

A reply came at once from Mr. Donovan, which said with considerable stiffness, that such a package had come, and had been deposited in his safe, until he should learn from his daughter to whom he could return it. The letters, he added, had been forwarded, but owing to many changed plans, he doubted if she had ever received them. He was returning the small box with this letter, and wished to say once for all that hereafter any gifts to his daughter must be in the form of candy or flowers, as she was not permitted to receive objects of value.

A few hours later a small, innocent wooden box was in the pocket of Mr. William West, and that young gentleman himself was at West Divinity in earnest conference with Luke Strange who was leaving that evening to spend Easter in Kentucky.

"On account of the age of the rector, and the heavy services," he explained with un-

necessary care to Heels, "I'll be there five days, arriving Saturday ——"

"You'll get there Saturday," interrupted Billy, jubilantly, too elated with the possible unravelling of his own tangle to guy the Rev. Luke about his sudden religious zeal, and his lack of filial regard in not spending his vacation at the sanitarium where his mother continued to enjoy wretched health.

"You'll get there on Saturday," repeated Billy, "and you must see Miss Kent that very night. Just tell her everything and put the whole blamed affair on me, where it belongs. Don't let up until you make her see that Gus is as innocent as a lamb, give her the ring and tell her that he still thinks it's lost, and hasn't a ghost of an idea of the true situation. Then for heaven's sake get her to write to Gus at once. If she'll just square it up with him, she can do anything she likes to me. He ought to hear from her by Monday."

But Monday came, and with it no letter for Angus. To be sure on Billy's disordered

desk was deposited a little pile of bills and other epistles apparently of a desultory nature, to which he paid no attention.

It was on the evening of that day, moreover, that Angus in his depression appeared to Billy alternately as a large and helpless baby, and as a stern and reticent misanthrope to whom a question would be ill-advised and unwelcome.

But Billy when he made up his mind to take water, could dive to the bottom with the best. He spoke at last, and spoke to the point.

"Gus," he said firmly, "you've got to tell me what's the matter."

Angus's jaw squared, then he crossed his arms on the table and leaned forward.

"I don't know, Bill, that's the trouble. I was sailing along, with everything serene, and suddenly struck a snag and went to the bottom."

"Was it anything about — that is did it have anything to do with the ring you lost?"

"I don't know," said Angus hopelessly. "I told her the truth and she said it was all right

and behaved like an angel. We parted the best sort of friends, and that was the end of it."

"But she has written to you," persisted Heels.

"Only once," said Angus, "and that was to say she wouldn't accept a duplicate of the ring. I'd been everywhere trying to find one like it, and was about to have one made, but when I told the jeweller I wanted a star sapphire that looked like a cat's eye, set in chastened gold, he seemed to think I was an idiot — which I am. Oh! it isn't the ring only. It — it's *me!*"

Billy set his teeth on his pipestem and clinched it. Then he spoke.

"Gus, it's not you at all. I'm the one. You can knock me down and I won't lift a finger to protect myself; you can do or say anything under heaven that you see fit and I won't blame you. I — I — the fact is ——"

It took but a short time to tell it, but a minute in such a crisis is quite a period. When it was over Billy was hot and breathless and Angus was pale and his lips were drawn.

"Where's my hat?" he demanded. "I am going out — I've got to send a telegram."

As Billy fumbled among the things on the table, his eye fell upon his little stack of unopened mail, and he recognized Luke Strange's handwriting. He slit the envelope and read aloud:

"Writing on train, reached home to find letter from mother begging me to come at once, as she is not feeling so well. Am therefore doubling on my tracks and returning to Blue Springs.

"During the few minutes I was at home, called up Mrs. Kent's residence, but failed to get an answer.

"I locked the ring safely away in the small cabinet in the drawing room before I left, and am now writing full particulars to Miss Jane."

"Bill West," shouted Angus, "get up there and hustle. Get out my suit case, and my shirts and shoes and all my glad rags. I am going out to telegraph to Strange, and to-night I leave for Kentucky!"

CHAPTER XVIII

In which Mr. Carmichael is discovered on his way to Kentucky; and Mrs. Binkins's calendar plays her false

FORTY miles an hour! What a snail's pace for an ardent lover whose imagination has flown again and again to its destination only to have to return to the actual, to upholstered seats of crimson plush, to a crawling landscape from a small square window, and to the monotonous throb of engine wheels.

But the fever of restlessness from which Mr. Carmichael was suffering was an intermittent fever, and there were periods of apparently blissful tranquillity during which he lay with his feet stretched forth, his hands deep in his pockets and such a look of beatitude upon his countenance as comes but once in a lifetime.

The world outside was full of the vague and tender glory of the coming spring; the budding trees, the stirring streams, the gentle thrill and pulsing of waking nature were all manifest; but Angus heeded them not. Summer or winter, autumn or spring, it was all the same to him — he was on his way to Jane.

He had left New York the evening before, yet a score of hours still stood between him and his destination. At every station he rushed to the platform, hoping it was the junction where Luke Strange had telegraphed he would meet him.

"Are you sure this is the only place where you can change cars for Blue Springs?" he at last demanded of the conductor, when the station was reached and no Strange appeared.

But before the answer arrived he caught sight of a small man running from the far end of the platform, peering into the train windows as he ran. The swing of the coat around the short, sturdy legs, the angle of the soft hat were unmistakable.

"Strange!" shouted Angus, half out of the window, "here I am!"

The train began to move slowly, and the Rev. Luke redoubled his pace.

"It's the second — right-hand drawer," he gasped at last when he had come abreast of Angus; "and here is the key to the cabinet. I've written Binkins — to be there — to receive you. I've written Miss Jane — Good-bye; good luck to you. Binkins — will — be there!"

And as the flushed and breathless little gentleman stood waving his friend out of sight, he little thought that at that moment the faithful Binkins was deep in preparations to attend the Barbers' Easter Ball with Mr. Mike Fahey on that self-same evening.

"This is Tuesday the sixth," she assured herself as she consulted the pictured calendar which had been given her two years before. "The seventh, Mr. Luke says, as plain as writing can make it, I'm to have things fixed up for Mr. Angus Carmichael. The nice young man! If he made such a stir as

he did with one leg, heaven knows what he'll do with two! Ain't I glad he's coming to-morrow instead of to-day! I never did have no luck, to speak of, till I met Mr. Fahey," and she smiled complacently as she went back to a tuck she was taking in an old gray silk dress which Mrs. Kent had donated for the occasion.

When the time for donning it arrived, she recklessly turned on all the lights and pulled her dresser out in the middle of the room. There were four small, tight puffs of hair which she had secreted for weeks, and which were now to be installed for the first time. It was a ceremony to be conducted with the greatest care and deliberation. She tried them in a variety of positions, holding a small mirror back of her head to observe the effect in the larger glass. Each new arrangement seemed to please her more than the last.

"If I could just keep the wobbly things on," she said to herself at last. "I've a good mind to try a knitting needle."

She went to her basket and, regardless of

future bother, drew a needle from the long row of stitches that were set upon it.

The experiment proved satisfactory after a small bow had been tied on each end of the needle, and Mrs. Binkins next turned her attention to the dress. The elbow sleeves and modest round neck embarrassed her greatly, but it was a pleased embarrassment that brought her back again and again to the mirror, each time more reconciled to the effect. It needed only the enthusiastic approval of Tillie, one of the Kents's maids, who dropped in to see her dressed, to complete her satisfaction.

"My goodness, Mrs. Binkins, you look ten years younger!" Tillie said as she assisted with the hooks.

"I ain't daring to think what Binkins would, a' said to all this foolishness," the flattered lady replied. "He was such a plain, sober-minded man, hadn't no eye for frivolity. But then," she gave a toss to her head, "it ain't Mr. Binkins I'm a-dressin' for to-night!"

Mrs. Binkins's elaborate attention to her toilet was not without its results. The Easter Ball of the United Barbers' Association, once in full swing, she found herself greatly in demand. Her escort prided himself upon his gallantry, and being a popular and jovial member of innumerable lodges, his "lady" albeit middle-aged and severe of demeanour, was given due attention.

She had even danced twice at the earnest solicitation of Mr. Fahey, once with the Master Barber and once with the President of the Bricklayers' Union.

When at last, flushed with success and the unusual exercise, she accepted Mr. Fahey's invitation for refreshments, she was in quite a frivolous frame of mind.

"I ain't danced for twenty years," she said, securing the knitting needle more firmly in her tresses; "but it's one of them things you ain't likely to forget."

"I bet you was a waltzer in your day!" said Mike Fahey admiringly. He was slightly handicapped by a pair of new patent

leather shoes, and a tight-fitting suit of large black and white check which the ready-to-wear tailor had assured him was called invisible plaid.

"Ain't it still my day?" she asked smilingly, as she toyed with the small metal purse that swung from her arm.

"Sure, an' it is," said Mike, "the top o' the morning. Let me fill up yer glass again for ye."

Mrs. Binkins complied, then she put her hand to her head.

"Mike," she said, suddenly, "what's in that bottle?"

Mike's large red hand promptly closed over the label.

"What makes your eyes so bright, Mrs. Binkins?" he teased.

"They ain't bright, are they?" she asked anxiously.

"For sure!" said Mike. "The dance got in and couldn't get out. You don't feel giddy, do you now?"

"Mr. Fahey!" she said in horrified tones, "you don't mean to say that you've gone

and given me spirituous liquor? And me a member of a temperance band, and the Rosalene Choir?"

"Try counting backwards," said Mike, "that'll steady your nerves a bit. Ye ain't seeing two of me, are ye?"

"Well I'll see the last of you, if you've been fooling me!" she cried, and with set teeth she loosened his fingers from around the bottle and disclosed the innocent label, "Ginger Ale."

At this moment a commotion at the entrance showed that the important guest of the evening had arrived. It was a would-be councilman, who was even now enveloped in prospective glory.

Mr. Fahey was good-naturedly pushing his way to the front to welcome the late arrival when a cry from Mrs. Binkins arrested him.

"My purse! That man took it! Mike, catch him! Mike!"

Mr. Fahey wheeled, and following in the direction indicated, fell upon the one man who was going away from the door.

"That's him!" screamed Mrs. Binkins. "The impudence of him! Put your hand in your pocket, sir — no Mike, make him do it of his own self! Put your hand in your pocket there and give me my metal purse."

The man turned uneasily in Mike's grasp.

"I ain't got it! Lemme go, you ain't no officer!"

"I ain't, ain't I?" said Mike, throwing back his coat with its invisible check and displaying his badge of office.

"You hold him, Mike, and I'll get my bag," cried Mrs. Binkins, and with a deft turn she recovered her property.

"There's a gentleman as wants to see him at the police station," said Mike; "will ye bide here till I come back from taking him?"

"That I won't," said Mrs. Binkins. I'm coming along to testify *my* evidence."

And with a grim look of determination, she fell in line behind the officer and his prisoner and marched resolutely through the space that was opened for them.

It was raining in torrents when they arrived

at the station, and for some moments Mrs. Binkins's attention was absorbed in trying to ascertain the damage done to her dampened finery.

When at last her mind became detached from her furbelows, she found herself in a small waiting room in the cheerful company of a dozen pictured criminals. Suddenly her eyes fixed themselves upon a large lithographed calendar that announced in letters six inches high that the date was

Tuesday the 7th.

The officers at the door were startled by a sedate feminine figure in gala attire, suddenly rushing through their midst, and, not waiting for umbrella nor explanations, hurling herself frantically upon a south-bound street car.

CHAPTER XIX

Which is all owing to that deceitful calendar, but is not so sad as it might be

JANE, do listen to the rain! It's simply pouring in torrents. I'm afraid our friend Mrs. Binkins will get some of her fine feathers draggled."

Mrs. Kent laid down her magazine, and looked across at her niece whose brown head was bent over some embroidery on the other side of the lamp.

Its amber glow was becoming — or was it that their week in the Blue Grass had brought back to Jane's cheek its customary tinge of rose, so noticeably lacking of late?

"Tillie was over to help her off," continued Mrs. Kent. "She said she looked quite grand in my old gown, and Mike sent her — what do you suppose? — calla lilies!"

"He's doing the thing up properly," said

Jane smiling. "Tillie said he came for her in the jag hack."

"The *what?*" asked Mrs. Kent.

"That's what the servants call the old carriage up at the livery stable that you get for half price."

"Mike is certainly growing reckless, and Binkins is not the housekeeper she was twelve months ago. Love affairs are most upsetting."

Jane held up her work, letting her needle dangle to untwist her floss. "And at Mrs. Binkins's age perfectly absurd!" she said.

"I doubt if Mrs. Binkins is as old as I am — I remember —— "

"My dear aunt! what has that to do with it?" Jane interrupted. "You aren't pretending to be in love with Mike Fahey, or anybody else, I suppose."

Mrs. Kent regarded her niece quizzically, the tip of her tongue touching her upper lip for a minute, before she said rather emphatically. "I trust not, indeed. I dislike pretence of any kind. I can't say I haven't

tried the game, but I never played it well."

If her look and words carried any special significance it was quite lost upon Jane, for that young lady was finding her own thoughts so absorbing to-night, that she was guilty of frequent lapses of attention. Even now a little tell-tale smile curled about her lips, as she threaded her needle with an azure strand. What interest had she in Mrs. Binkins and Mike?

The rain dashed against the windows and Mrs. Kent returned to her magazine. After a brief pause however, she spoke again.

"By the way, what did Luke have to say? Didn't I see a note addressed to you in his handwriting on the table this morning?"

Jane looked at her vacantly.

"Jane do you know you are awfully queer to-night? You make me creepy, as if I were reading a detective story. Has Luke committed some crime, and are you trying to conceal it from me?"

"Luke?" Jane repeated; then — "I beg your pardon. I was thinking of something

else." She laughed vaguely. "Why yes, he said — he said his mother has had a relapse at the Blue Springs — he found the telegram waiting for him here." And Jane laughed again.

"I must say I like your sympathetic attitude toward Mrs. Strange. I wish I could make a Roman holiday of her, so to speak, but she gets on my nerves."

"She's an abominably selfish old woman. She makes herself ill just to worry Luke," said Jane.

"I think you are right, there, only perhaps she isn't altogether conscious of it. I wonder if a shock of some sort might not do her good?"

"She takes electricity all the time," answered Jane, who was fast lapsing into her happy dreamland again.

"I don't mean anything so tame — a mental — a moral shock — some desperate deed on Luke's part."

"Desperate? — Luke! What can you mean?" Surprise had brought Jane back to present company again.

"Did it ever occur to you that he might marry?" asked her aunt.

"I don't know——" she stammered. "Would you call that desperate?"

"At times it appears to me in that light."

"But is he—has he—do you think——" faltered Jane.

Mrs. Kent beat a rapid retreat from her advanced position. "Oh don't ask me. I was only thinking the person who married him must be rather brave. Yet it might be a good thing for Luke."

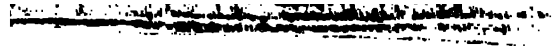
"Well I can tell you one thing," said Jane, "if I wanted to marry Luke Strange—which I don't—I'd marry him, in spite of all the hypochondriacal old women in all the sanitariums in the country."

"My dear Jane!" It was Mrs. Kent's turn to laugh, and laugh she did, quite uncontrollably.

Jane laughed a little too. Then she began to fold her work. "I think I'll go upstairs," she said.

"By the way, Janey, what has become of

"By the way, Janey, what has become of our two Yale friends?"



our two Yale friends? Wasn't there some talk of their coming out for Easter?"

Pausing on her way to the door, Jane bent over a bowl of violets as she answered. "I suppose they gave it up. I had a letter from Billy West this afternoon. He said he was going home."

She did not add that he had said other things far more important; things explanatory and deeply repentant, which together with Luke's note had changed the colour of the world for Jane, and were responsible for that absence of mind which has been noted.

"Your correspondence seems to be with Billy, and yet I had an idea you preferred Angus. There was no question as to *his* preference," Mrs. Kent remarked, adding, "I myself took a great fancy to Angus. It was easy to see he was made a continual victim of practical jokes by Nixie and Mr. West. The traits that are his greatest charm made him easy game."

Jane turned in the doorway. "Yes," she said, "they were neither of them fair. They

made me believe things that were not true, — I know now."

"Ah-ha! You do?" said Mrs. Kent to herself, smiling at Jane's back. "I knew there was some trouble. I wonder what Nixie Donovan did?"

Left alone the laughter faded from her face, and rising she began to pace back and forth the length of the library. "Oh the arrogance of youth — the finality of its judgments," she murmured. "Incredible alike that Mrs. Binkins or I should — well, it is rather incredible, isn't it?" She came to a halt before the pier glass. The image it gave back — one of pleasant curves and soft tints — was consoling. "One may look young, yet the very phrase proves one is not. But, after all ——" she smiled and the dimple asserted itself, its cheerful philosophy triumphed, she lifted her arms above her head. "What do I care for all the arrogant youth in the world, or for all the hypochondriacal old women? I thank you Jane for that."

Still smiling, she passed from one window to

another to make sure the bolts were secure for the night. At the side window she paused and looked across the stretch of lawn at the neighbouring house, about which the shadows lay dark until a vivid lightning flash illuminated it for a second. In that brief instant Mrs. Kent fancied she saw the figure of a man near the side entrance. It might have been a moving shadow, for the wind was still high, though the rain had ceased; but as she lingered she saw the blue spurt of a match, and the unmistakable figure of a man passing stealthily to and fro.

Then a vivid flash of lightning cut the inky darkness and it was in that flash that Mrs. Kent, trembling behind her curtain, saw a man crawling through one of the windows of the house next door. Not moving from her post, she reached forth her hand and touched the bell beside the mantel.

"Tillie!" she whispered when the surprised maid appeared. "Don't be frightened; don't make a scene. Just do as I tell you. There's a burglar breaking into Mr. Strange's! I

saw him get in the window. Run upstairs and tell Miss Jane to call up the police station. Don't make any noise — and hurry! I'll watch here."

A few moments later Jane came tip-toeing down, with Tillie close behind her, and the three fluttered back and forth between the library window and the front door in great excitement.

"They are awfully long coming," whispered Jane, trying to control her chattering teeth. "Just suppose Mrs. Binkins had been there alone."

"Horrible!" said Mrs. Kent. "But then she would have her police whistle, and we haven't anything but a dinner bell."

"I hear something!" cried Tillie, on the verge of hysterics. "It's screams! Oh! Oh!"

But the noise proved nothing more than the chugging of an automobile, which stopped at a discreet distance from the house, while five police hurried up the street, pausing at the Kents's door only long enough to get the necessary information.

Another interminable wait occurred during which the trio, shivering on the front porch, started at every sound.

"Do you suppose they'll put him in the penitentiary?" asked Jane. "Oh! I almost wish he'd get away."

"I hope they'll hang him," said Tillie savagely, and at that moment interest rose to fever heat, for matters seemed to have reached a climax next door. Excited voices were heard and a shrill whistle was blown, and just when they weren't wanted two street cars passed with a wholly needless clanging, so that all the watchers could discover was, that a concentration of forces had taken place and a great deal of talking was going on.

"Heavens! a policeman is coming back over here," said Mrs. Kent. "I hope he doesn't want us to testify in the police court! You go in, Jane, you didn't see anything that happened."

Jane went reluctantly within just as the officer came on the porch.

"Have you caught your burglar?" asked Mrs. Kent.

The policeman removed his hat. "Yes Lady," he replied. "We've got a burglar, or a darn fool — one or the other — askin' your pardon. He says as how he's a friend of yours."

"Then he must be the other, for I haven't any burglars on my list," said Mrs. Kent. "A friend of mine?"

"So he says, and he looks like a gent, but there ain't no reason in the story he tells — not to my mind."

"Don't let them bring him in here, Mrs. Kent, don't!" expostulated Tillie, running into the house, and as quickly returning.

"Nonsense, Tillie, I'll have to see my friend," her mistress replied; and the officer called, "O'Connor, bring the young feller over and let the lady take a look at him."

"Please Mrs. Kent, don't be alarmed," a familiar voice was heard saying, as the burglar and his guard came across the grass. "I'm awfully sorry about all this fuss, but I

can't convince them I'm not a professional housebreaker."

"Angus Carmichael, in heaven's name!" cried Mrs. Kent, while Tillie exclaimed, "La! Miss Jane, it's that lame young man Mrs. Binkins was so good to last winter. Ain't that gratitude now?"

Angus held out an eager hand. "Tell them I'm not a thief, will you Mrs. Kent? It was Miss Jane's ring — the star sapphire — it was lost you know — it has been a grand mix-up — but anyhow, Billy gave it to Luke who left it here when he was called away. He met me at the train with the key of the cabinet where he'd put it; but when I got here the house was locked, and I couldn't get in. Then I tried the windows and found the pantry one unlocked. There really was no other way, you see, Mrs. Kent, I just had to have that ring to-night."

"Of course you had, you dear boy. You couldn't have waited till morning possibly. Who is this coming in?"

It proved to be a stout and somewhat dis-

hevelled person in a crumpled silk dress, with three puffs of hair dangling across her flushed forehead.

"Mrs. Kent! Mr. Angus! What's happened? What's the matter?" she called, even before she reached the steps, then not waiting for an answer, she proceeded to unburden her own conscience in a torrent of explanation.

"That's what I get for going by a little ten-cent calendar that Mr. Luke's cousin give me for a Christmas present. I might have known that all the money went into them flowers and birds and no 'tention being paid to the figures what-so-ever. Tuesday the 6th it said as plain as letters could make it. And I went by it. I trusted it. And here Mr. Angus comes home and nobody to meet him — got arrested did he? for climbing in the window? Who arrested him?"

Her eyes swept the group on the steps and she recognized several familiar faces.

"And it's you, Captain O'Connor, and you, Mr. Murphy, that I left playing cards in the

police station not half an hour ago. Why don't you stay where you belong? What do you come 'round arresting New York young gentlemen that's expected on a visit, and would have been met with open arms if it hadn't been for a little old ten-cent calendar that ain't worth the paper it's printed on!"

Her feelings overcame her, and being exhausted by the various excitements of the evening, she sank on the porch, regardless of the rain soaked boards and burst into tears.

"There, there!" said Mrs. Kent reassuringly. "Mr. Carmichael will forgive you, I am sure. Let him come inside now. Jane! Where's Jane?"

"She's in the library," Tillie ventured, "crying like everything. I told her there wasn't no call to be skeered no more, but—— "

"Perhaps Mr. Carmichael, you could reassure her, while I disperse the crowd," suggested Mrs. Kent, nor did Mr. Carmichael stand upon the order of his going.

Jane sat on the sofa with her head buried in a cushion. Angus paused at the door.

"Jane!" he cried, "I've made a mess of it, but I'm here, and I've got the ring. Aren't you glad to see me?" Then advancing, "Aren't you going to look at me? Isn't it all right now?"

There was only a quiver of her shoulders for answer and Angus looked down at her in consternation.

"Didn't Billy write you, and Luke?"

She nodded into the pillow.

Then the old Angus, in eclipse these many months — the knight of the suit case, breezy, confident — emerged for good and all. "If you don't stop crying and speak to me," he said, "I'll do something desperate — I'll — if you say go, I'll go, but if you don't —— "

Jane didn't — and the next minute she was held fast in a pair of strong arms, and her tear-stained cheek buried on an athletic shoulder.

"Why won't you look at me, Jane?" Angus demanded, and his voice told her he was enjoying himself.

"Because — because — I look so horrid when I cry," she faltered, half laughing.

The arms tightened about her. "You darling goose of a girl. I know better. But what are you crying about? Tell me instantly."

"Because I called the police when you were trying to get my ring, and because I thought — oh, because of it all! I shall never forgive Nixie Donovan — never!"

"Why I could forgive the devil right now," said Angus triumphantly.

CHAPTER XX

In which the curtain falls upon our All-Star Cast.

WHY describe a pier in North River in December as a big Mediterranean liner is about to depart? Everybody knows the joyous nature of the crowd, the cabs struggling through the press, the hurrying to and fro of uniformed attendants, the arriving of florists' boxes, the line of faces along the rail above, and the general air of contagious expectancy prevailing.

"Hurry, Dad," said Miss Nixie Donovan to her parent, as, leaving a taxicab, they plunged into the crowd. "I simply could not have Jane and Angus get off without my good-bye after the darling way they forgave Billy and me. There's old Billy now! See? Waving from the promenade deck? He said he was going

to try to get down from Boston to see them off."

The gentleman referred to was leaning over the railing, waving violently to attract their attention not only to himself, but to the young couple beside him who seemed entirely absorbed in each other.

"West?" said the parent of Miss Donovan, frowning, "am I expected to know him? Is he the young man of the ring and the letters of last winter?"

"Of course, Angus's best man, you know. We haven't seen each other since the wedding three weeks ago, and I've simply got oceans to tell him. Now Dad, you calm right down at the start, sir. I'm not going to have you cutting up about every man I look at. Besides this is purely platonic. Ask Jane. Doesn't she look adorable up there in that long coat? I don't wonder the Carmichaels over in St. Louis went crazy about her."

"What does young Mr. Carmichael do," asked her parent, with an eye to the practical.

"Makes love, principally," said Nixie, "but he's going to make saddle-trees when he comes home. Fancy old Gus buckling down in his papa's factory."

They were on the gang plank now, and the trio above made a rush to meet them. Amid the babel of the greetings, and laughter and chaffing of the young people, Mr. Donovan was almost forgotten.

"What is it, Daddy dear?" asked Nixie, at last, "what are you lifting your eyebrows at me for? Am I talking too loud, or is my hat on crooked?"

"Both," said Mr. Donovan, "but what I was trying to state was that the steward with the telegrams is calling out the name of Carmichael."

A second later Jane was tearing open an envelope. "From Aunt Marcia, of course," she was predicting. "I was so afraid she would feel forlorn and deserted. It is probably a last word to reassure me."

But if the purpose of that little yellow

missive was one of reassurance it failed in its mission.

"Why! Why Angus!" and Jane looked up from the paper and gazed about in helpless bewilderment. "It is from Aunt Marcia, — but listen!" And in tragic tones she read:

"Married, December 10th, at 9 A. M. in the chapel of All Saints' Church, Mrs. Mansfield Kent and the Rev. Luke Babbrage Strange. (Signed) M. S. and L. S."

"There is more," said Jane, "there is a postscript. It is signed M. S. It says, 'The mother of the groom was the only attendant.'"

"Well, what do you think of that?" said Billy West, the first to recover. "Say, everybody get chairs. I'm not host on this occasion, but I feel a need of support. Think of His Chubbs!"

"Here's another!" said Angus, excitedly, looking up from a yellow paper of his own. "Listen to this wire from old Luke to me, will you? He's calling our bluff of a year ago when we held him up on the Yale Campus. Come to think of it, it is a year, just a year

ago to-day. Here's his wire; 'May be met at Como at any date you set. L. S.' "

"There's the bugle!" cried Mr. Donovan, "hurry up, we must get ashore."

Angus held out a mighty right hand to his chum:

"Bill, old man," he said, with a proprietary look at the little lady beside him, "in that all-star cast, you seem to be the only one that failed to get a permanent part. My condolences!"

Ten minutes later Mr. Donovan and Nixie and Billy West watched the big liner back out of her crib and swing out to the open sea.

"I can see them still!" cried Nixie on her tip-toes. "Jane is waving Gus's cap. I want something to wave — your bonnet, Billy!"

Mr. Donovan turned impatiently: "Well I'm a busy man. Say your adieux, Nixie. You return to Boston to-day, I suppose, Mr. West?"

The tone was suggestive, even hopeful.

"No," said Billy cheerfully, "I am stay-

ing in New York for the present. The fact is, I have business here."

He did not intimate — perhaps it was hardly necessary — that the business had a certain connection with a permanent part in the all-star cast.

THE END

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